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Diasporic Identities, Community Relationships and Post-16 Transitions

A qualitative study of the educational and career choice-making biographies of Somali young people in London.

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***Diasporic Identities, Community Relationships and Post-16
Transitions: A qualitative study of the educational and career choice-
making biographies of Somali young people in London***

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This thesis presents qualitative research on the construction of choice biographies of a group of Somali young people in London. It highlights the nature of intergenerational and community relationships in the Somali community and how this relates to the ways in which Somali young people engage with educational opportunities. It also discusses the role of the young people in mediating the resettlement process of their families in the diaspora, arguing in particular that they are the critical agents regarding the process of their parents' resettlement in the UK. Using semi-structured qualitative interviews, I have collected data from thirty young people and thirteen informants from this community's organisations. Through an exploration of the Somali community context of the young people's choices, it has emerged that while there has been a shift in orientation more towards permanent residency than a return to the country of origin, there are increasing concerns related to intergenerational social mobility.

My data show that young people's aspirations, expectations and choices involve more than 'rational' decision-making, for they are entangled with three interlinked phenomena: individual biographies; family and community processes and the prevailing structures of the host society. The thesis shows that it is the interaction of these dynamics that define choice/outcome discrepancies. I argue that the establishment of the Somali community in the UK is bound up with the re-enactment of pre-migration narratives and I show how community processes mediate the ways in which the younger generation of this community engage with the opportunity structures, and define their identities and sense of belonging in the host society. My data suggests that, despite concerns around intergenerational mobility, there is among these young people much optimism towards educational opportunities, and that education is widely considered as the only available avenue for social mobility. Moreover, it is argued that young people show strong agency in trying to write their choice biographies, but that their outcomes are ultimately governed by the hegemonic context of employment opportunities. The thesis argues that with maturation young people settle for a 'getting by' strategy and that to a large extent the *agentive* attitudes shown by them are an expression of a combination of immigrant optimism, adolescent optimism and strategies for managing the uncertainties that characterise contemporary youth transitions. I also suggest that through critical engagement with hegemonic structures these young people can find their niche between their own capabilities and probabilities in the labour market.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Background and the research problem

London is home to one of the largest Somali diaspora communities in the West. The presence of this community in the UK dates back to the nineteenth century after the establishment of the British Somaliland Protectorate, when young Somali men went into the shipping industry as seamen or joined the British Royal Navy as soldiers and eventually came to settle in port cities in the UK. In fact, they became one of the first black communities to settle in the UK. Their number grew significantly in the late 1980's and early 1990's following the collapse of former Somalia's last central government in 1991. There are no reliable figures on the number of Somalis in the UK. The most reliable data are provided by the Office for National Statistics, which according to Hopkins (2006), in its 2001 Census estimated the number of Somalis in the UK to be 43,373. In 2011, the Office for National Statistics estimates the Somali-born population at 101,000 for England and Wales (ONS, 2013).

What these census figures show is that the number of Somalis in the UK is far from accurate for a number of reasons. First, as will become apparent from this thesis, the confusion these figures create is reflective of the 'Somali' identity which has become problematic to define. That is, not all people of Somali-descent subscribe to the 'Somali' identity and may even be happy to identify themselves as just 'Africans' in official documents. Second, some people of Somali-ethnicity may originate from countries in the Horn of Africa, like Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya and may prefer to take the official identity descriptions linked to these countries in official documents. The debate of how people from Somaliland should identify themselves in official registers has also started. Similarly, Somalis relocating from mainland Europe like the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden and Norway, may tend to classify themselves in terms of their acquired citizenship. For instance, van Liempt (2001: 570) reports that 'between 10,000 and 20,000 have left the Netherlands for the UK'. Finally, the census figures refer to Somali-born only and therefore do not capture data for second-generation Somalis, notwithstanding that these may simply identify themselves as Black British. Consequently, the above figures only give a conservative estimate of the size of the Somali community in the UK and hence, the actual number is certainly much higher.

The UK is not the only destination for Somali refugees, for dispersed around the globe ‘with an estimated 429,000, they are ranked by the UNHCR the fifth largest refugee population in the world’ (Kleist, 2004). With this number reflecting only cases registered as refugees, it is estimated that over one million Somalis are scattered across the globe (Lindley, 2007: 5). This movement has led to the emergence of a large Somali diaspora community, which is becoming recognisable in the British demographic landscape. Migration biographies of dislocation and pre-migration social practices, which have partly contributed to this very dislocation, continue to shape its everyday experiences. Migration experiences of refugee communities are specific in that their reasons for departure (Kunz, 1981) are different from those of voluntary immigrants who are attracted by the pull factors in the receiving countries. Often, refugees have no choice in leaving their native homelands, and for them the push factors are political persecution or civil war. Moreover, unlike economic migrants, these communities maintain different links with their country of origin or have different social relationships among themselves in the diaspora (Wahlbeck, 2002). The Somali community can be described as a ‘community in transition’, which is in the process of establishing itself in the UK and dealing with the traumas of displacement, a community which is showing signs of what is akin to what Zhou and Bankston (1994: 822) call ‘adaptational difficulties’. These adaptational difficulties could in part be related to the suggestion that the Somali community has come to resettle in a ‘culturally and linguistically distant’ host country (Kunz, 1981).

The Somali community shares these dislocation experiences and adaptational difficulties with other refugee communities, but it also has another problem, which is the historical kinship-based segmented social structure (Kusow, 2006; Lewis, 1961) brought from the home country and enacted in the host society (Griffiths, 1997). In his classic anthropological work, Lewis offers an elaborate analysis of how the logic of kinship-based social structure has historically undermined a ‘Somali common interest’ and despite the challenges of racism and exclusion practices faced in the West, the role of kinship embedded relations continues to shape the social life of Somalis. A second theme in Lewis’s work is that nomadic pastoralism, which historically underpins economic life in the home country, ‘militates against the formation of a stable territorial group’ (Lewis, 1961: 2), for despite the appearance of homogeneity, there is ‘the

invisible difference' represented in clan identity (Lewis, 2004). Relating 'the Somali problem' to their social organisation, Lewis (1961, 1998) discusses the pervasive system of segmentary social organisation of the Somalis, by which he refers to the 'primarily decentralised and highly fluid Somali political structure, which is defined by genealogical reckoning' (Lewis, 1998: 101). Segmentation refers to a fluid nature of kinship organisation 'that enshrines structural precariousness as a norm' (Lewis, 1961: xi). That is, reciprocal relations among Somalis are often sanctioned by shifting clan-based affiliations, and this shifting nature of the kinship system renders it deployable as a 'culturally constructed resource' (Lewis, 1998: 105). Arguing that the social organisation of Somalis is based on a segmented lineage system, Lewis writes that it:

[P]rovides inherently oppositional and confrontational basic identities that are mobilized when competition and conflict develop over material resources, power, personal security, and reputation. (Lewis, 1998: 101)

As I discuss in Chapter 4, these features of the Somali demographic profile are crucial for studying the ways in which those in the diaspora interact with one another and with the wider society. They are important because, while many argue that Somalis not only come from an ethnically homogenous group, but also culturally, religiously and linguistically share a common background, their polarised social relationships raise serious questions about the homogeneity perspective. Relations among members of different groups within the Somali community reflect historical and social relations in the home country. Consequently, theorisations of the Somali immigrant community remain inadequate without considering the interrelated historical social practices, pre-migration narratives and political dynamics in the home country. Political analysis of Somali-related matters is highly charged by competing interpretations (Barnes, 2006), which are beyond the scope of this research. They are invoked here merely to contextualise social relations among the Somali diaspora and to show how the processes of forming a common front among this community are bound up with the interplay of complex historical and political processes in the 'home country'. In this respect, it is argued that the ongoing political instability in the home country has a negative impact on the emergence of social capital to facilitate intergenerational social mobility and monitor the incorporation process of Somali young people into the host society. As

Colletta and Cullen (2000: 3) contend, with the disintegration of the Somali State a similar process of polarisation has taken place among the Somali people in the diaspora.

Studies on the Somali community in the diaspora are few but growing. Here, it is germane to outline the major works in this area, their main findings, and the main research questions yet to be addressed. In the following I discuss three strands of literature and the first type relates to the theme of 'community'. A study by Hopkins (2006) on Somali community organisations in London and Toronto highlights the lack of effective representation and inclusive service delivery among Somali community organisations. Griffiths (2000) conducted a comparative study on Somalis and Kurds in London and found that there was a trend and willingness among the Somali community to self-organise, which has resulted in the emergence of numerous community organisations in those boroughs with a sizeable representation. However, this burgeoning of community organisations is segmented and has not necessarily translated itself into a meaningful sense of community representation, and according to Griffiths, has not contributed to strengthening community relations among Somalis. One can suggest that polarisation within the community has rendered such organisations often ineffective in serving the young people. Griffiths and Hopkins's studies raise serious questions about the role and effectiveness of informal community organisations among the Somalis. They relate this problem to the re-enactment in the UK of pre-migration social relationships characterised by inter-clan conflict. Fuglerud and Engebrigtsen (2006) give a succinct account of the role of the pre-migration histories in the way the Somali community integrates in the host society. By comparing the 'social networks' among the Somali and Tamil communities in Norway, these authors conclude that the way in which social networks among the former are structured does not help them adapt to life in exile. For rather, support, they suggest, is often mediated through family-based networks. The central argument in their study is that while Tamils are hailed as model immigrants in the media, Somalis have been depicted as less successful in adapting to life in Norway.

It appears from these studies that the intergenerational social mobility of Somali young people is, in part, adversely affected by the lack of what Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) call 'bounded solidarity' – a form of group solidarity among immigrant communities who face common prejudice and discrimination from the host society. In

this regard, it is held that individuals in the immigrant community tend to cooperate to challenge collectively the hostile environment in the host society. According to Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993), the 'common threat' that ethnic minority communities face generates enough support for community cohesion. However, a common threat is not the only binding factor, for even if this diminishes, discrimination on its own does not warrant the emergence of group solidarity. Bounded solidarity also involves the privileges one can access through community networks for competing effectively with what is available in the wider society (p. 1336). The discussion outlined above sets out the context of the socialisation of Somali young people in explaining the intergenerational dissonance not only in terms of an absence of cohesive community relationships, but also in relation to how the role of human agency explains much of the individual success stories.

There is also a growing literature on how the Somali young people in the diaspora construct identities (Ali, 2001; Ajrouch and Kusow, 2007; Bigelow, 2008; Fangen, 2007a and 2007b; Forman, 2001; Jorden et al., 2009; Langellier, 2010; Sakyiwah, 2012; Valentine et al., 2009; van Liempt, 2011). For example, Valentine et al. (2009), in their comparative study of the experiences of young Somalis in Aarhus (Denmark) and Sheffield (UK), found that the identity narratives of the young people in their research were 'confused about what it feels to be Somali', because much of those that configure their native identity have been passed down by their parents. They argue that the mode of Somali-ethnic identity or the Muslim identity is differently expressed by the two groups of young people, which they explain in terms of the reception context in the different countries. They suggest that the multicultural policy in the UK offers much greater room for expressing Muslim identity than the liberal policy in Denmark provides for their counterparts. In other words, the extent to which minority ethnic identity is expressed is associated with the hegemonic context and policies of integration, because 'all identities are situated practices' (Valentine et al., 2009: 246). That is, the strong Somali community in the UK provides stronger anchorage for re-enacting their native heritage than for their counterparts in Denmark.

In her study of Dutch-Somali people settling in Leicester and London, van Liempt (2011) has arrived at similar findings. She concludes that what underpinned their decision to migrate from the Netherlands were the economic factor and the need for a

sense of belonging. Consequently, it can be seen in both studies that identity and belonging are treated in a differentiated way. According to Valentine et al. (2009), while Somalis in Denmark enact a Danish identity through language and the level of their religiosity is more moderate, their belonging is constantly challenged by the hegemonic hostile attitude towards immigrants. As for the UK, Valentine et al. argue that the multicultural policy allows immigrants to 'define their own identities and their own communities' (Valentine et al., 2009: 244). While Somalis in both Denmark and the Netherlands have linguistically become part of the host society, it is the denial of recognition that limits their full participation in the host society and it is the responses to contradictions in multicultural policies that partly feed into the 'emerging transnationalism' (cf. Chapter 4). The outcomes of these studies suggest that the use of language as a key marker of identity has its limitations. Valentine et al. found that while the Danish policy demands that immigrants speak the Danish language, within the same policy and popular discourses, immigrants are seen as 'strangers' signifying their not-belonging in the country. They found that while Somalis in Denmark enjoy the freedom of practising a more moderate form of their faith, their counterparts in the UK have the freedom to enact both their native language and faith. The question then arises as to how the freedom to enact native heritage as opposed to not being able to do so, impacts upon Somali young people in terms of their strategies for engaging with the opportunity structures.

Consequently, there are concerns about marginalisation and the risk of social exclusion surrounding Somali young people. These emanate from the racialised and classed context that defines the experiences of contemporary youth. However, in the specific case of Somali young people, these concerns are further compounded by the dilemma that many of the first generation immigrants usually face: choosing between permanent residency in the receiving country and returning to the originating one. Questions that resonate among the first generation of the Somali community in the UK include: Will Somali young people fare well in the UK educational system and labour market? Or, will they 'assimilate downwardly' (Zhou and Bankston, 1994) in the youth subcultures that plague many of their peers from ethnic minority backgrounds? Somali young people have recently attracted much attention from the media and because of the global security concerns are described as 'people of interest' (Kabir, 2014: 3). For example, in the summer of 2009, Aljazeera TV aired a programme about Somali-on-Somali crime in

London fronted by the Somali-born British journalist Raage Omaar, raising concerns about an emerging gang culture amongst Somali young people. Omaar talks about 'generational crises' within which young Somalis, alienated from British society, take on their fellow countrymen 'with tragic results', which the father of a victim of such gang crime in the programme describes as a 'double blow' (Omaar, 2009). The programme features the case of two Somali young victims at the hands of rival gangs and it is not the number, but the nature of the killing that raises a moral panic among the first generation Somalis.

While it is unclear whether these cases are just isolated ones with no significance, it is similarly unclear whether they could be just the tip of the iceberg of a large-scale problem linked to the generational crises. In any case, a similar pattern of alienation from mainstream society has been reported by Somali young people growing up in the West and more recently, there has been a trend for those alienated joining *jihadi* wars abroad. For example, in October 2008, Shirwa Ahmed, a 26-year-old young Somali-American, allegedly carried out a suicide mission at the Presidential Palace in Hargeisa, Somaliland. Ahmed is believed to have probably been the first American citizen driven by a 'jihadist' ideology to become a suicide bomber and was one of a group of Somali young people raised in the diaspora who returned as '*jihadists*' to their country of origin to join others. Since Ahmed's alleged suicide bombing, several other similar cases of suicide bombings related to Somali young people returning from the diaspora have been reported in Somalia. Moreover, as I was revising this chapter in July 2014, sixteen-year-old twin sisters 'with 28 A*-C GCSEs between them,' according to Glendinning for the Manchester Evening News, were reported to have joined *jihadi* fighters in Syria (Glendinning, 2014).

While at the family level there is much emphasis on investing in children's education, at the community level there are initiatives for collective community responsibility for intergenerational guidance. Understandably, there is intergenerational dissonance in acculturation, orientation and perceptions of what is worth doing in that while the first generation's concerns are mainly focused on the political developments in the country of origin, the second-generation tend to focus on the here-and-now. The stories of Ahmed and the twin sisters are perhaps extreme examples of how disaffected young people in search of identity and belonging have been attempting to understand their

transnational experiences; but these cases are not isolated ones, for the trend of radicalisation continues. According to Joseph and Maruf (2014), in Canada alone ‘experts estimate that between 50 to 100’ Somalis have left to join jihadi wars in Somalia or Syria. The latest of these trends are the two high profile cases of a 21-year-old Somali-Canadian, Farah Mohamed Shirdon (Huffington Post, 2014) and 22 year-old Finish-born Hussain Faisal Ali, the son of a prominent politician and former presidential candidate in Somaliland, Faisal Ali Warabe, who joined militants in Syria (Somali Press, 2014). Shirdon was a nephew of Somalia’s former prime minister, and in August 2014 he and Ali were shown on social media. Shirdon was shown in a passport burning ceremony, which could be described as ‘a rite of passage’ to symbolise the departure from his acquired Somali-Canadian identity and initiation into a new *jihadi* identity. A few weeks after this initiation ceremony was circulated around social media, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) reported that Shirdon had been killed and a school friend commenting on the event stated: ‘the enraged man yelling in a heavy accent was radically different from the quiet boy living in Braeside who spoke like most Calgarians’ (Herald, 2014). One way of reading the development of life trajectories of young people like Shirdon is to draw upon the role of social processes, because these play a vital part in individual actions. As Blackledge and Hunt (1985) point out, in times of war ‘people feel compelled to act against one of the very basic human instincts: avoidance of death’ (p. 9). This compelling power clearly comes from the social structure where expectations, norms and values largely constrain people’s choices and freedom. However, these compelling powers do not take away the role of agency, because as will become increasingly clearer throughout this thesis, young people coming of age in the diaspora are catalysts of the transformation that the community is undergoing.

The identity narratives of these young people raise critical questions, perhaps controversial ones, about adherence to native heritage and they are controversial in the sense that religiosity is viewed with suspicion. Commenting on his son’s journey to Syria, Faisal Ali Warabe stated: ‘he [Houssain] has started to frequent mosques’. This creates a paradox for many parents in the sense that those who embrace the native cultural heritage are at increased risk of feeling out of place in the host society. Similarly, those who are not initiated in the native cultural heritage and narratives of immigration embedded in the notion of achievement remain at risk of downward

assimilation. Consequently, constructively engaging with the opportunity structures does not necessarily decrease the risk of disengagement, for the generational crises affect both those who assimilate downwardly into the ‘at-risk’ youth subcultures and those engaging constructively. On 7th August 2013, the Economist featured an article on ‘Britain’s Somalis’ raising concerns around intergenerational differences, problems of identity and belonging, suggesting that Somalis suffer ‘ethnic penalties’ in the search for jobs (Economist, 2013). These problematic issues associated with the search for identity and belonging surrounding Somali young people define their daily experiences of their trying to fit into the host culture. To a great extent, the problems described here are as much manifestations of a deep-seated pre-migration crisis within Somali community relations that are enacted in the diaspora, as they are contradictions of the multicultural context within which these young people are making their everyday choices.

One has to be cautious in interpreting media discourses. Not only are many media reports anecdotal, but also, more seriously, quite often some sensationalist tabloid-type media are among the chief tools for feeding popular hegemonic sentiments that represent immigrants as ‘misfitting’ in the host culture by their own choosing. As Frymer (2006: 105) argues ‘the power of mass media permeates the very foundations of identity and consciousness and creates social reality’. When Mo Farah, the Somali-born British athlete, won double Olympic in 2012, he was hailed as an icon of the multicultural ‘melting pot’ in the media discourses. He himself has reinforced this multicultural dimension of his identity by wrapping himself in the Union Jack and by a ‘publicly-performed embodiment of a British Muslim identity’ (Bursdey, 2007: 612; Werbner, 2013b). Moreover, while the young people represented in the above are portrayed as multicultural rejects, Mo Farah is ‘personified’ as a ‘role model for multicultural Britain’ (Bursdey, 2007: 612). However, notwithstanding the representation of the Somali community as ‘failed’ in some media reports, its incorporation into the dominant culture is problematic.

Part of this problem is related to the issues of citizenship, identity and belonging. As I will describe in Chapter 4, the Somali community is characterised by ambivalent internal relationships that are mediated by historical and pre-migration narratives as well as being further compounded by the stratified social system they joined. British

education provision and its organisation are marked by class division and inequalities (Crozier, 2014; Fangen, 2006; Gillborn, 1997; Reay, 2001) and Somali young people are unfavourably positioned in this context, because of their racial and socioeconomic positioning. Consequently, their life-chances, like those of their peers from other immigrant backgrounds, are strongly defined by these macro-structural factors. In this work, I will draw on research in both the US and the UK, which has shown that the educational and career aspirations and outcomes for different ethnic minority young people vary, thus raising serious questions about the limited scope of exclusively structural explanations (Archer and Francis, 2007; Bradley and Taylor, 2004; Modood, 2004; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Zhou and Bankston, 1994). The diversity among different communities and the richness of the multicultural society are at the base of the idea that while 'subjected to exclusionary and racialised practices, 'new' migrants do not fit easily within the more static or binary notions of cultural and biological racism' (Archer and Francis, 2007: 29). Critical understanding of the educational aspirations and outcomes of young people from immigrant communities, and the risk of exclusion these young people face, thus, requires consideration of their pre-migration narratives and how these interact with the contextual dynamics.

A third strand of literature reviewed for the purpose of this study relates to the theme of education and here, too concerns have been raised. According to Harris (2004), who has conducted a review of studies on Somalis in the UK, one of the key themes emerging from the literature was related to concerns raised about the educational achievement of Somali children. A recent study published by the London Borough of Lambeth, for instance, reports that these Somali children underachieve (Demi, Lewis and McLean, 2007). After compiling statistical information from across 28 local authorities in London, Demi et al. found that 29,395 Somali pupils attend London schools and go on to report that only '43% of these Somali children were gaining 5⁺A*-C GCSE grades in comparison to 60% of the White British pupils, 56% of African pupils and 49% of Black Caribbean pupils and 74% of Indian pupils' (p. 12). Despite the valuing of education by Somali parents and the organisation of after school classes, there is little evidence to suggest a successful transition of the youth to post-compulsory trajectories.

Ali (2001) studied the experiences of Somali women in London by considering 'how education interacts with changes in gender relations caused by migration'. She found

that due to the migration experiences and arrival in a host society with different institutional and social arrangements, the Somali family has undergone substantial changes, i.e. it has changed from an extended to a nuclear form. She also found that the role of women in the family has been changing as they are now subjected to the extra social pressure in the preservation of religious and cultural practices. Alitolppa-Niitamo (2004), in her ethnographic study of Somali young people in Helsinki, addresses the question of how young people contemplate their futures in the context of a myriad of social and economic factors that they are unable influence (p. 97). In her discussion, Alitolppa-Niitamo argues that the position of the Somali immigrant family is weakened by 'cultural and linguistic discontinuities' in their new homeland (p. 98). That is, because of the short duration of their stay in Finland, they lack experience of the Finnish schooling system, and so the parents are not well equipped to help their children navigate the schooling system or institutional opportunity structures (p. 91). In fact, it is the children who have to assist their parents in interpreting this, and so it seems that parent-child roles are reversed. Alitolppa-Niitamo claims that, in general, young people integrate into the host society much faster than their parents and consequently, take on an interpreter role for them, particularly if they do not master the host country's language.

According to Alitolppa-Niitamo (2004: 98), the faster acculturation rate of the Somali young people into the host society comes with a price, for through interpreting for their parents, they become prematurely exposed to family decisions, including those that affect their education. This puts them in an awkward position and raises questions about the role parents should be playing so as to guide their children through the education process. It also leads to intergenerational conflict. Whilst young people quickly master the host language and become familiar with the subtleties of the host culture and its institutions, older generations often struggle with coming to terms with the disruptions to their cultural and linguistic practices. Young people take on multiple identities and their behaviour outdoors clashes with how they are expected to behave while at home. Parents, on the other hand, want to retain their minority ethnic heritage and ensure their children adopt it, but the context in which they want to impart cultural traits to their children does not ease the process. Second, Alitolppa-Niitamo argues that with the unmediated exposure of the second-generation to new norms and values comes another price. For, while Somali young people have to negotiate their integration into the host

culture, they at the same time run the risk of assimilating into dominant youth subcultures in a detrimental way. That is, given the weakened position of the family and the prevalent pressure in their neighbourhoods, they are exposed to an increased risk of being involved with negative aspects of these youth subcultures.

The intergenerational conflict resulting from the differential ways Somalis young people and the older generation adapt to the changing family dynamics, and participate in the host society impacts on both family and community dynamics. Drawing on Zhou's work (Zhou, 1997), Alitolppa-Niitamo (2004) refers to this as a 'generational dissonance'. Zhou (1997: 995) deploys this concept to refer to 'situations where children's level of adapting to the host culture does not correspond to that of their parents nor conform to their parental guidance'. He contrasts this strategy with 'generational consonance' which 'refers to situations where both children and their parents agree the terms under which they either integrate or abstain from integration'. Suggesting that these differences have implications for the bonding forms of social capital within the family, Alitolppa-Niitamo points out that the position of the Somali immigrant family is weakened, which potentially can lead to a breakdown of the much needed parental guidance and intergenerational support (2004: 91). Although conducted between 1996 and 2000, and referring to her sample as the 'generation-in-between', Alitolppa-Niitamo's study, nonetheless, gives an early indication of the mismatches between the aspiration of Somali young people and the institutional opportunities available to them. A core finding of her study is that culturalist explanations for the way in which second-generation immigrant young people participate in education are not sufficient to account for their social mobility. Instead, she emphasises three intersecting aspects: the role of human agency, the personal attributes of individual immigrants and the conditions they meet in the host society.

Key arguments of the preceding discussion can be summarised into three topical areas of interest. First, it can be argued that the internal relations of the Somali community in the UK, or indeed in the diaspora for that matter, have become problematic. There are concerns surrounding the economic and political participation of the Somali community, in general, in the host society. The works cited above show the struggle exiled Somalis have had to endure to deal with the shock of life in an alien culture. This problematic resettlement process and the dynamics of the community relationships, in

part, are mediating the ways in which second-generation young people of this community construct their choice trajectories in the host country. Second, Somali young people growing up in the West appear to be confused about their sense of identity and belonging. The confusion exists in terms of the contradictions embedded in the multicultural policies or even more so in the integrationist policies in their new host nations. The examples of the studies cited above offer some crucial insights into how the lack of political representation is bound up with the historical narratives and transnational experiences of Somali first generation immigrants. Thus, both the risk of social exclusion from mainstream society, on the one hand, and the risk of cultural/linguistic discontinuities from native cultural heritage, on the other, appear to be the field within which Somali young people have to operate. Third, another theme emerging from this brief review of the available literature is with regards to the challenges Somali young people face in the realm of education.

Understandably, concerns surrounding poor educational performance as well as gang culture and radicalisation are primarily manifested in the popular media. Just as important is to note that these concerns manifest themselves at the level of the family, where, to begin with, there is a tension brought about by conflicting parental expectations and the opportunities available to their children. This intergenerational discrepancy of expectation entails the view that while parents expect much from their children, the latter are caught up in growing up in increasingly challenging conditions, thus increasing their risk of marginalisation. Of course some young people positively engage with the educational and employment opportunities, but the concerns remain of disaffected others making a ‘downward assimilation’ into the contemporary youth subculture, where positive engagement with the schooling system is no longer considered to be the norm, or even more worrying, falling prey to radicalisation.

Bringing these themes together, I suggest that not much is known about how the life-chances of the young people of this community are bound up with the diaspora identities that they construct through their interaction with the host society; how community links bear on their choice biographies; and how the interface of community dynamics and macro-structural conditions of the host society shape their aspirations and life-chances. Perhaps more importantly, even less is known about how ‘othering’ practices and racial prejudice in the host country discursively position Somali young

people within the hegemonic social relations in the wider society. Furthermore, discourses around these young people appear to conflate their problems with those of their community. There is a complete absence of linking problems Somali young people face to the more contemporary youth problems and it is this gap that I intend to address in my research. In many respects, the study is both timely and crucial. It is timely in that with the majority of the Somalis arriving in the UK in the early 1990s, the first cohort of the second-generation of this emerging community have either reached the school-leaving age and left school or are already into their further or higher education. This research focuses on the changes this community is undergoing in the diaspora, the challenges it faces as well as the reproduction of pre-migration social practices within it and the role of such community relations in the ways Somali young people engage with educational and career opportunities. More specifically, the research will focus on the following three inter-related questions:

1. How do Somali young people construct their educational and career aspirations and engage with the educational opportunities available to them?
2. How do issues of identity and belonging and the dynamics of the Somali diaspora community shape these processes of construction and engagement?
3. What can community organisations, schools and policymakers do to support the post-16 transitions of Somali young people better?

1.2 Thesis structure

Having provided the background to this research, the rest of this chapter will define the key concepts used in this thesis. Chapter 2 presents an extensive discussion of the literature relevant to the topic and distinguishes four theoretical perspectives pertaining to the formation of aspirations: age-related discourses, structural perspectives, the role of human agency and subjectivity, and finally the role of contextual factors with a focus on analytical frameworks offered by social capital. The thrust of the chapter is to argue that these four perspectives are not only tools for making sense of young people's construction of choice biographies, but also represent distinct dimensions of the ways in which young people construct their choice biographies. Chapter 3 outlines the adopted

research approach and provides the rationale for the methodological choice made. It discusses epistemological, ontological and methodological considerations, while also explaining and justifying the research design, the data collection tools and strategies for the data analysis.

These initial chapters are followed by the empirical Chapters 4 to 8 that present the data analysis. Chapter 4 introduces the context of the researched community and also extends some of the ideas introduced in Chapter 1 by providing a detailed empirical analysis of accounts by community workers. The overarching aim of the chapter is to set out the community context within which Somali young people construct their educational and career aspirations, their identities and belonging. It discusses the resettlement trajectory of the Somali community in the UK and delineates key definers of that process, including the historical context of pre-migration narratives of the community as defined by civil war, social organisation, post-migration experiences and the paradoxes that shape community relations in the host country. This contextualisation of the researched community is continued in Chapter 5, where I discuss the ways in which Somali young people discursively position themselves in the 'host country'. I have put host society between inverted commas because it has different meanings to first generation immigrant parents and their second generation children. Focusing on the mediating role of social relationships, translational links and the level of incorporation into the host society, I differentiate three overlapping manifestations of this new diaspora identity: circumstantial, Muslim and multicultural. I describe these three ways of self-identification as the *diasporisation* of identity, and argue that these different categories represent different degrees of this identity.

Identity shapes how one engages with opportunity structures in that it underpins the choices one makes in life. Against the backdrop of the discussion presented in Chapters 4 and 5, I continue the discussion by turning to the ways in which Somali young people engage with the education process in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. In these chapters I differentiate three categories or strategies of approaching educational and career choice-making: idealistic choosers, contingent choosers and contextual choosers. In Chapter 6, I discuss the category of 'idealistic choosers' who share the overarching theme of pro-education *habitus*, which entails a strong positive attitude towards education. I argue that most Somali young people position themselves 'inside' the education system in that

their actions and choices are driven by family biographies. I suggest that this pro-education attitude partly represents the ‘immigrant dream’ of the parent generation and the self-betterment objectives which underlie the process of migration. The pro-education *habitus* is also an expression of the increasing role which education has recently come to play in the Somali migrant community. A third factor in the pro-education *habitus* I distinguish is the role of age and agency and in this context I suggest that the pattern of positive attitude towards education is reflective of the lack of lived experiences of the Somali young people.

Chapter 7 highlights a second strategy young people deploy for engaging with their choice biographies that is ‘keeping options open’. I call young people in this category ‘contingency choosers’ and I differentiate three dimensions associated with their choice strategy, namely the role of family cultural capital; the deployment of contingency planning as a way of managing risks associated with contemporary youth transition; and the tendency to resort to the ‘immediacy of the present’ as a way of managing critical decision moments. The third and last category of the way in which young people go about their choices is one that is informed by critical reflection on the possibilities in the employment market. I discuss this strategy in Chapter 8, where I outline how the process of educational and career choice-making varies gradually from idealistic to realistic self-positioning. I argue that changes reflect the fact that the choices are not static, but evolve over time as young people continually revise their plans and reflectively make adjustments. This changing pattern of aspirations appears to reflect the age, experience and agency of the young person, because meaning-making is associated with life stage. Another key point discussed in this chapter is that the agential connotations of, and assumptions underlying, ‘aspiration’ or ‘choice-making’ strategies do not always give an accurate account of the processes these strategies represent. Educational outcomes are in the end contextual and shaped by the prevailing opportunity structures. The final Chapter 9 of the thesis draws together the key findings from the research and the analytical framework presented in Chapter 2. It also discusses the policy, practical and theoretical implications of this research for understanding the social mobility of the Somali community in more general terms as well as for understanding Somali young people in other similar countries and in light of these recommendations are put forward.

1.3 Defining aspiration, choice-making and expectation

Educational and career choice-making is one of the most problematic decisions to make for the developing young person. In their final year of compulsory education they expect, and are expected, to work towards achieving grades for their school leaving exams, which facilitate their progression into further education and beyond. Transition to post-compulsory education presents an opportunity for them to exercise individual choices of not merely choosing a whole new set of subjects, but also and more importantly, whether they want to remain in education. The process of educational and career choice-making has become ever more complex, for it involves meticulous exploration of the opportunities, that is, striking a balance between individual biographies, capabilities, interests and the opportunities available (Furlong, Woodman and Wyn, 2007). Compounded by the contemporary unfavourable youth labour market conditions, choice-making has become ever more critical. The process of making career choices in the current context of the competitive labour market has become ever more complex for young people for two reasons. First, transition to the world of work has changed considerably, because of technological innovations, the introduction of flexible working hours, which has attracted more women, and the de-industrialisation of the British economy (Archer, 2002; Bradley and Devadason, 2008; White, 2007). These structural changes to the organisation of the labour market have rendered the transition trajectories for graduates, let alone school-leavers, ever more daunting. Choice-making is, therefore, increasingly becoming inevitable and all the more important. Elster (1989) argues that it is precisely because of uncertainty that planning is necessary, for ‘without uncertainty we might not even want to plan for the future at all’ (p. 38). The paradox is that for some young people this very ‘uncertainty’ is the reason why they postpone planning their lives. Second, contemporary arrangements of the labour market and the current unfavourable youth employment market conditions, in which jobs for life are no longer the norm, raises critical questions regarding the utility of the notion of ‘choice-making’.

Giddens (1994) argues that ‘daily life would be impossible if we didn’t establish routines, and even routines which are nothing more than habits cannot be wholly optional; they wouldn’t be routines if we didn’t, at least for longish periods of time, place them effectively ‘beyond question’ (p. 75). Beck (1992) puts this necessity to

make life choices succinctly: 'the option of not deciding is tending to become impossible' (p. 116). However, despite the critical importance of the formation of an educational and career choice process, young people often have only vague ideas of the educational and employment opportunities open to them upon leaving compulsory schooling (White, 2007: 169). The idea of 'choice biography' is an integral part of the late-modernity discourses within which young people are expected actively and reflexively to construct their identities through life choices (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991; Dwyer and Wyn, 2001). That is, educational and career choice-making is increasingly becoming an essential part of everyday life. For, career plays a central role in people's lives because of its ramifications for other domains of life and it also impacts on the quality of life, because 'occupations structure a large part of people's everyday life' (Bandura et al., 2001: 187). In general, whether it concerns choosing exam options at school leaving age, or educational pathways for post-16, or contemplating what to study at university, educational choice-making is no longer optional, but obligatory and has attracted the attention of educational researchers, sociologists, economists and psychologists (White, 2007).

The definition of aspiration and its related concepts of 'choice-making' and 'expectation' is usually found within the agency/structure debate that defines the contours of much educational research. A number of critical observations can be made about the definitions of these concepts in the agency/structure discourses. First, the deployment of the term 'choice' by both policymakers and researchers has been criticised for implying an active role on the part of the individual and thereby evoking a certain level of autonomy, agency and control over one's destiny. Choice-making is too ambitious a term; according to Ball et al. (2002: 51), 'it threatens all sorts of theoretical and methodological difficulties, because if it is not handled with care it evokes the assumption of free agent'. It also presupposes the existence of accessible options while ignoring the power dynamics in society. Regarding this, aspiration has been high on the agenda in major government policies aimed at improving the participation of marginalised communities in the higher education system (Burke, 2006). Similar assumptions of 'agency', 'autonomy' and 'options' seem to underlie the notion of 'aspiration'.

Moreover, the notion of 'choice-making' evokes equality of opportunities. Drawing on Bourdieu's work, Ball et al. (2002: 70) argue that the 'very idea of 'choice' presupposes

a kind of formal equality that obscures the effects of inequality'. This is problematic because the perceptions of opportunities and construction of self-image are one thing, the reality of achieving one's life aims are quite another, for the realisation of ambitions involves external factors over which not every individual has control. For example, alternatives open to school-leavers immediately after leaving compulsory education are limited both in scope and in nature. In scope, because options for them are disappointingly restricted to choosing between staying-on and dropping-out, while competition for young graduates in the labour market is similarly fierce. In this respect, there is nothing optional about 'choice-making' since it often concerns 'realisable futures' (Ball, MacRae and Maguire, 1999: 214) that is, choosing the possible, in which case it might not be classified as a choice *per se*, but rather as 'a virtue made out of necessity' (Bourdieu, 1984).

Aspirations and choice behaviour may be mediated or driven by young people as rational agents engaging reflectively with choices, but educational outcomes are determined by prevailing opportunity structures or are mediated by normative expectations emanating from societal processes. Clearly, many actions that pass as an individual choice are best mediated through interaction with others or are even arrived at by default. Choice-making in educational settings is a multidimensional process, where structural forces have a defining impact and these come in various forms. The concept of opportunity structure (Roberts, 2009) offers a good example, for as Furlong, Biggart and Cartmel (1996: 552) argue it 'is useful insofar as it promotes a greater awareness of the existence of powerful constraints which shape the experiences of social groups'. Here it is suggested that aspiration is inextricably bound up with self-image (Bandura et al., 2001; Gottfredson, 2002). Since 'identity' is socially embedded, aspiration is similarly not framed by individual dispositions alone; it reflects one's social and ethnic background. One can thus argue that young people choose careers that are compatible with their self-concept. Choice-making and its related notions of aspiration and expectation are, then, shaped through social processes.

From the foregoing it is apparent that career choice-making is both conceptually and practically a complex process. Conceptually, it is closely associated with a range of other key sociological and psychological concepts, including: attitude, ambition, interest, aptitude, values, norms, outlook, expectations, opportunity structures and social

relations. It is practically complex because the processes these concepts represent operate through a nexus of relations at the level of the individual, family, neighbourhood and nationally. Moreover, individual dispositions, such as resilience, motivation, ambitiousness and ability, interact with socially constructed characteristics, such as class, gender, 'race', sexuality and disability. Certainly, how the interaction of these factors pertains to the formation of career aspirations differs for different social groups, and more so for individuals, and in addition this interaction is also spatially and temporally embedded (Furlong et al., 1996). Thus, Jacobs et al. (1991: 613) contend that 'aspirations are not simply formed as passive responses to the expectations and injunctions of others; they involve an active, experiential, conscious, calculations'. For Jacobs et al. 'aspirations reflect an interesting mixture of societal and personal influences' (p. 614) of what is the norm, which have spatial and temporal dimensions because the norm is context-dependent. Spenner and Featherman (1978) define aspiration as 'goal-setting behaviour in an environment (field) of personal values and subjective probabilities for success in attaining the goal in question' (p. 375). Career choice-making, then, can be described as a process of identifying options, developing plans of action and assessing the probabilities of achieving desired outcomes within the constraints of opportunity structures.

The conceptual connection between career aspiration (a desired outcome) and choice-making (process, means) needs to be separated out. Aspiration entails a sense of aiming to achieve a desired goal and, as will be argued later, it is often associated with the factor of 'age' or growing-up, and diminishes with maturation. Choice is informed by aspiration; in other words, it is an enactment of aspirations (a desired future). However, this is not the only way young people manifest their aspirations and in some cases even actual choice-making does not follow these. Likewise, educational choice-making is not the same as the formation of career aspirations. Some choices are active, others reactive, again others are default choices, for as Elster (1983) argues 'preferences underlying choices could be shaped by constraints' (p. vii). Like Bourdieu (1977), Elster proposes that 'choice' is not an enactment of aspiration (a desired ideal outcome), but precisely its opposite, i.e. an internalised objective reality.

Choice and aspiration, then, are the two sides of the same phenomenon in that both terms refer to life goals. Choice is a reflection and an enactment of aspiration, but not

every choice is an enacted aspiration *per se*, just like aspiration does not necessarily lead to an active choice. Aspiration does sometimes inform immediate choice, but sometimes some choices are arrived at through no active choice (choices by default). Moreover, choices made alter subsequent aspirations. Interaction between these two phenomena means that the formation of aspiration is never static, but a dynamic process that is formed gradually and, regardless of its realisation, is often long term oriented. By its nature, expression of aspiration does not always reflect what is realistically possible, but what is desirable. Closely associated to aspiration and choice-making is the notion of ‘expectation’. This refers to the likely and envisaged outcome based not only on interest, but more importantly on ability, whereas aspiration refers to an ideal career identity compatible with one’s self-concept. One final point about the differences between the two concepts of ‘aspiration’ and ‘expectation’ is that the former refers to what people want to happen, while the latter pertains to what people think will happen and is realistically ‘achievable’ (Baird, Burge and Reynolds, 2008; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). In such a situation, the notion of choice, like that of expectation, reflects what is realistically feasible. However, what these notions share is that they are interlinked through a process-product relationship and each has implications for the other. That is, choices are strategies (process/effort) for achieving aspired for careers (product/outcome).

1.4 Defining identity, ‘race’ and ethnicity

A second theme of this study is ‘identity’ and its related concepts of ‘race’ and ethnicity. Identity is illusive, multifaceted and difficult to define (Bauman, 1996; Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Hall, 1996; Jenkins, 2008). The elasticity, multiplicity and ambiguity of the term ‘identity’ is captured in Brubaker and Cooper’s (2000: 1) description where they argue that “‘identity’ ‘tends to mean too much (when understood in a strong sense), too little (when understood in a weak sense), or nothing at all (because of its sheer ambiguity)’. For the purpose of this study, it is seen to be a relational concept that is considered in terms of similarities and differences in the sense that the very sameness entails difference (Hall, 1996; Jenkins, 2008). It is to do with recognising strangers from non-strangers and this recognition forms the basis for an inclusion/exclusion problematic constitutive of identity itself and its related ideas of community and citizenship (Hall, 1996). Identity is not merely an attribute one acquires

or simply claims, for it can also be a 'signifier' assigned by others in dominant positions (Hall, 1996). One can contest or embrace assigned identities, or have claimed identity either sanctioned or rejected by others and as such, it entails a complex process of negotiation in a nexus of minority/majority power dynamics. With this perspective, identity is to a large extent constructed through discourse, and like any socially constructed reality (i.e. 'race' and ethnicity) is produced and reproduced through social discourses. Archer and Francis (2007) define discourse as 'referring to socially organised patterns/frameworks of language, knowledge and meaning' (p. 26). Identity thus involves more than the presumed attributes it signifies (Brubaker, 2004; Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Gewirtz and Cribb, 2008; Gewirtz and Cribb, 2009; Jenkins, 2008).

Related to identity is the idea of 'race'. This has been discredited as a biological category (Fenton, 2003; Hall, 1996; Maisuria, 2012; Modood, 2005), for as Gannett (2004) argues, because 'genetic variability is statistically distributed across the species, essentialist ideas about 'race' no longer hold' (p. 326). Gannett explains that 'race' is, therefore, not a biological, but 'an ideological concept invented in the late-eighteenth century and deployed to justify the exploitation of the colonised by the coloniser' (p. 325). Nevertheless, the term continues to feature in the literature on educational research, but its deployment is now mainly based on its political meaning. Some argue that the term 'ethnicity' is another means of continuing with the ideological and ontological precepts underlying 'race' to explain differences between different 'racial' groups or communities. That is, 'race' and ethnicity are often used interchangeably as analytic categories in the discourses around the educational outcomes of social groups, but these notions clearly have different meanings. According to Fenton (2003), the idea of ethnicity 'is a gather-all term that refers to the social construction of descent and culture and the meanings and implications for classification systems built around them' (p. 3, 6).

Identity can be conceptualised as a source of liberation and inspiration, which can be deployed as an instrument for achieving certain ends either by those who identify or by those who are identified (Brubaker, 2004; Hall, 1996; Lounsbury, Modood and Teles, 2005). In this conceptualisation, identity is similar to ethnicity, which according to Lounsbury et al. (2005), is deployed as capital. According to Hall (1992), the term ethnicity refers to an acknowledgment of the 'place of history, language and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity', which he argues is 'context-bound', in the sense that 'it has

no existence apart from interethnic relations' (Cohen, 1978: 389). However, the development of identity in contemporary times is not passive, for as with aspiration it entails a degree of agency. Bauman (1996) states 'the hub of postmodern life strategy is not identity building, but avoidance of fixation' (p. 24). That is, much as dominant institutions discursively position young people, depending on time and space young people actively construct multiple identities (Archer and Francis, 2007). There is a continuous interaction between their human agency and educational institutions (structural) and the normativity found in social relations. As Modood (2005) argues, ethnic identity is not necessarily limited only to participation in cultural practices. A case in point here is the second-generation young people of immigrant parents who despite the decline in their participation in cultural practices (i.e. language, religion, marriage) still retain 'allegiance' (p. 469). This continuation of allegiance perhaps represents the political dimensions of ethnicity and 'race', in the sense that people resort to these categorisations as a way of demanding recognition and partly as a response to '*othering*' practice they face from the majority population.

The way young people engage with opportunity structures partly depends on their sense of identity and belonging, which in turn is shaped by social relations within their community networks. From this perspective, identity can be conceptualised in the context of the 'politics of recognition' (Fraser and Honneth, 2003) and in its relations to time and place (Hall, Coffey and Williamson, 1999). Fraser and Honneth discuss the intricate relationship between seeking recognition and redistribution, pointing out how difficult it is to reconcile the ends of these two strategies. It can be argued that people associate their sense of self-image with their geographical belonging as found in the discourses around citizenship. Depending on their duration in the host country and their links with the country of origin or descent, immigrant communities and their children assume different identities. Accordingly, identity shapes the ways in which young people from immigrant communities exercise their citizenship rights and engage with opportunities in the 'host society' or in their country of descent. Identity in this respect can better be understood in its relation to belonging both to a cultural group and a geographical area.

In the literature, the concept of identity is also often used together with the concept of 'belonging' (Bell, 1999) and sometimes interchangeably, but for the purpose of this study, I make an analytic distinction between the two concepts. While identity is more

about 'being and becoming' (Jenkins, 2008: 97), belonging refers to how this 'being and becoming' relates to space and place and in the words of Hall (1990: 225) undergoes 'constant transformation'. It also entails dimensions not included in the definition of identity, such as 'feeling at home and feeling safe' (Valentine, Sporton and Nielsen, 2009: 244). Moreover, while identity refers to membership of a community, belonging is more geographical in the sense that it refers to bounded territory like states (Yuval-Davis, 2006). This said, with the penetration of social media in our daily lives, it could be argued that people can belong to an entity that is not geographically bounded, but is virtually connected and the same can be said about the role of faith in connecting people beyond physical boundaries. This implies that the idea of who we are or want to be draws its meaning from our shifting sense of belonging to space and place. According to Yuval-Davis, belonging involves an 'emotional investment and attachment' to a geographical location, which probably can be conceptualised as 'the relationship between location and identification' (Yuval-Davis, 2006), and as such, extends the meaning of the idea of identity from its social to its geographical connotations. With this perspective, the enactment of a certain identity is not coterminous with belonging. So, as noted earlier, Valentine et al. (2009) argue that while the Somali young people they studied enact a Danish identity, they do not feel they belong to Denmark because of 'their race and faith' (p. 244). These authors contrast this identity/belonging discrepancy in Denmark to the UK situation, where they argue 'immigrants enjoy relative freedom to define their own identities and form their own communities'. Valentine et al. (2009) show how the enactment of racial and faith identities define the feeling of belonging of immigrants in their adapted countries. According to Portes and Rumbaut (1996: 134) 'refugee groups tend to reclaim a strong self-identification, defined more by the continuity with their own past than by a defensive response to events in the present environment'. Displacement entails that geographical belonging among communities of refugee backgrounds is more complex than among voluntary immigrants. This difference has implications for the processes underlying their transnational links and their engagement with the opportunities in the host country.

Despite the fact that identity is a subjective self-positioning, it nonetheless has an objective bearing on people's social mobility. In line with Loury et al. (2005), social mobility is, for the purpose at hand, defined as 'the degree to which individuals are

affirmed by others as equal partners in the community' (p. 2). This way of approaching social mobility is for Loury et al. closely related with the ideas of 'recognition' and 'social citizenship' and not necessarily with social class or economic status. This reading of identity within the context of social mobility and citizenship has, according to van Houdt et al. (2011: 423), a strong 'political programme' in that citizenship is used as an instrument for 'managing population'.

The concept of 'identity' and its associated terms of 'race' and ethnicity remain relevant for the study of young people's aspirations, because the development of career aspirations is to a significant extent a reflection of their self-image, belonging, group membership and citizenship. According to Loury et al. (2005: 4), 'individuals often make choices on the basis of perceived groups averages'. For Loury et al. 'racial and ethnic groups are not just fictive categories, but real in that they harbour real institutions through which resources are hoarded and distributed' (p. 5), and have implications for what Modood (2005) calls the 'assertion of politicised ethnicities' (p. 466). For instance, the ways in which the identity of minority youth is talked about in the public domains plays a crucial role in defining their educational outcomes and in sustaining social inequalities. That is, in school settings the negative stereotyping or lower teacher expectations, which some minority ethnic youth experience, often lead them to take on a particular learner identity, which alienates them from positive engagement with schooling (Archer and Francis, 2007; Modood, 2004). Thus, the discursive construction of identity involves a complex process of negotiation between partners with unequal powers. It is in this sense that, in addition to being a signifier, identity can also be a discursive tool, which can be deployed to stereotype and perhaps even oppress certain groups. Identity, then, is a double-edged sword that can be used to stereotype certain groups or as a source of liberation, aspiration and self-pride. The concept of 'identity' is crucial because young people's career aspirations are partly a reflection of how they see themselves and partly of how they are seen by others. With respect to this, Sporton, Valentine and Nielsen (2006: 210) contend that 'the social identity assigned to them may compete or clash with a personal and learner identity they claim to achieve at school'. The way young people engage with opportunity structures partly depends on the quality of their social relations within their community networks.

1.5 Defining community

Much like the development of aspiration and identity (and their related notions), the idea of community is defined through social relationships. But what is a community, and how is it related to aspirations and identity? Like many sociological concepts it is contested (Amit and Rapport, 2002; Bauman, 2001; Blackshaw, 2010; Brint, 2001; Cohen, 1989; Lee and Newby, 1983). According to Lee and Newby (1983: 57), 'community can be seen as a local social system and as a type of relationship, or as a sense of identity'. Along the lines of Tonnies distinction of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gessellschaft*, Cohen (1989) contrasts the idea of 'community' found in traditional societies with the abstract meaning it has taken in modern day industrial ones, where it is 'that entity to which one belongs, greater than kinship but more immediately than the abstraction we call 'society'' (p. 15). In contemporary times the idea of community is a logical extension of the 'social mobilisation of shared descent and culture, despite the fact the sharing of these attributes are questionable' (Fenton, 2003: 3-4). This view of community sharing questionable attributes comes close to Anderson's thesis of the 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983) in which he lays out how through the printed medium, among other things, the idea of the nation emerged along with its associated nationalism, causing unconnected people to come to share 'imagined' commonalities. However, despite this social constructedness of community, there is always the 'danger of over-concretising' what it really entails (Fenton, 2003: 4). As Modood (2005) argues, 'minority ethnicity is for visible minority groups not a choice' (p. 406).

Thus, in its contemporary usage, the idea of community transcends ethnic and racial boundaries and could include professional groups within ethnically defined ones, as well as people sharing some kind of practice, ideology, history, interest, etc. Community embodies identity in much the same way aspiration embodies, or is embodied, in identity. In other words, there is an overlap among these concepts, and the idea of community creates the context within which young people's identity and aspiration are developed. Although the development of these phenomena cannot be reduced to community processes alone, the idea of community nonetheless symbolises people's existence, giving meaning and content to their selves (Cohen, 1989). As such, it is closely associated with identity, belonging and citizenship. Identity is one of the many attributes of community, while the geographical dimension of the idea of community lays bare the assumption that once they leave their native countries,

immigrants and their descendants automatically form a minority group from the perspective of the majority population they join. It is the presence in a host society in the diaspora that gives the community for people of immigrant backgrounds its meaning, not only because the taken-for-granted dimensions of shared culture, history, language and nation in the originating country are all challenged in the host country, but also because of the politics of recognition (Fraser and Honneth, 2003; Modood, 2007).

Diaspora entails transnationalism, which in turn encompasses multiple geographical belongings, thus suggesting some form of cultural and geographical distance from the country of origin or descent accompanied by an emotional link with that country (Brah, 1996; Wahlbeck, 2002). The term 'diaspora' has now become widely incorporated into the discourses around the Somali immigrant community. For, because of their large number, involvement with the dynamics in the home country and their transnational networks, those in exile are now referred to in this way (Kleist, 2008). The Somali equivalent for diaspora is *Qurbo-joog*, with the word '*Qurbo*' originating from the Arabic '*ghareeb*' meaning a stranger; and '*joog*', which is a Somali word for sojourn. *Qurbo-joog*, then, refers to those estranged from their native country and because of their role in the dynamics in the originating country, either through financial or through knowledge remittances, or through political engagement, the *Qurbo-joog* community has become an established transmigrant community with profound influences on these dynamics.

The deployment of the idea of community is important because, in addition to the nexus of class, 'race', ethnicity and gender for members from refugee and ethnic minority communities, contextual factors and immigration biographies shape how they relate to citizenship in the host society. Indeed, one cannot talk about the educational aspirations and outcomes of young people of ethnic minority backgrounds without making reference to these concepts ('race', 'ethnic' or even 'community' and their derivatives). It is essential because it functions not only as a frame of reference, but also as a source of inspiration for the development of identity – inspiration and aspiration. In this sense, the idea of community functions, in Bourdieu's terms, as a 'field' or as the context within which young people's perspectives become shaped. It functions as a resource from which young people derive a sense of self-esteem, security, belongingness and

‘strategically position themselves in relation to others’ (Gewirtz and Cribb, 2009: 138). However, the problem is that the use of these terms is usually ethnocentric and their deployment more often than not is made with reference to ‘visible’ ethnic minority groups. Thus, Modood (2007: 38) points out that the term ‘ethnicity’ ‘was initially introduced as a description of non-White Anglo Saxon Protestants while in the UK it was mainly used to refer to non-whiteness. This ethnocentric deployment of these terms implies that the majority ethnic group in these countries is *de-ethnicised*, *de-racialised* and *de-communitised*. Consequently, this uncritical use of the terms maintains the status quo of marginalisation, stigmatisation and pathologisation, rather than making explicit salient ‘*othering*’ assumptions underlying their deployment, which according to Jensen (2011) refers to the pathologising discourse that ‘relegates ethnic minority groups to a subject position as others’ (p. 65).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter presents a detailed discussion of four theoretical perspectives pertaining to the development of career aspirations that will inform the analysis in subsequent chapters. The first section draws on literature related to the factor of age (both in its developmental and social dimensions), in which it is argued that children's aspirations change with their age and life stage and that as they grow older 'the individual-in-context' takes precedence over childhood imaginations, dreams and motivations. Discussion of the structural dimensions of aspirations will be presented in the second section, whereas in the third, I turn to the literature on the role of human agency in the construction of aspirations. In the last section, I focus on the extant literature on the experiences of young people from immigrant and minority ethnic communities by presenting a fourth dimension of career choice-making, i.e. the role of social capital discourses and related notions of culture, ethnicity and identity in creating the context for the ways in which these young people engage with education.

2.2 Age-related dimensions of aspiration

Quite often, talking about the development of career aspirations in the educational domain involves talking about children, adolescents or young people. This general statement is based on the assumption that the factor of age is so central to the understanding of the development of aspirations, because irrespective of their social origin or gender the individuals in question are first and foremost children. Adolescence is a critical period for young people, because they undergo substantial changes, some biological and physical, others psychic and social (Sugarman, 2001), and these changes in personal development continue into early adulthood, bringing with them changes in identity (Arnett, 2000; Strauss, 1962). According to Arnett (2000), the period of emerging adulthood is marked by leaving the parental home, starting intimate relationships, financial independence and most importantly also the 'the exploration of identity in the area of work, love and worldview' (p. 473). Due to the changes accompanying adolescence, it could be described as a period for exploring possibilities, meaning and purpose in life (Damon, Menon and Cotton, 2003). The term 'adolescence' entails a period in the life stage of the 'becoming' young person to prepare him or herself for what is to come and to plan for the life they wish to lead at a future time

(Morss, 1996). This conception of adolescence as ‘becoming’ and not ‘there’, as yet, is entailed in the developmental sense of childhood/adolescence where the position of children in the family is framed as ‘dependents’ and ‘socially incomplete’ (Bourdieu, 1984). In this sense, the term is inevitably embroiled with values that emanate from the way in which society is organised. Young people are expected to be educated and progress to work; they are seen as requiring guidance around planning their futures, and simultaneously are expected to develop the necessary competencies to be able to deal effectively with the adult world of work.

According to Arnett (2000), emergent adulthood is a period when young people start to make serious choices about their lives, during which the formation of identity, an essential part of young people’s lives, also takes place. Jones and Wallace (1992) describe youth ‘as the process of definition and free definition, a negotiation enacted between young people and their families, their peers and institutions of the wider society’, contending that the definition of the term ‘youth’ has changed over the past hundred years (p. 4). Key terms of their definition include ‘dependence’, ‘independence’, ‘legal age of majority’, minor and citizenship rights. In a similar vein, Valentine (2003) defines ‘youth’ or young people [as] those aged between sixteen and twenty-five’ (p.38). So the term ‘young people’ then refers to both the latter part of adolescence and early adulthood. Moreover, the duration of adolescence has changed over history and also varies across societies (Brannen and Nilsen, 2002; Lesko, 2012; Morss, 1996). These differences are reflected in the provision of education and in the ways in which the labour market is organised. The changes young people experience during their adolescence and early adulthood, to some degree, reflect the societal expectations of them. That is, age is bound up with the concept of ‘role’, which is assigned to the becoming young person through primary socialisation (Musgrave, 1974). Hence, one way of defining ‘young people’ is to draw on ‘age’ and the related concept of life course. Consequently, one might argue that the term, young people, or its associates, youth and adolescence, are largely defined within social processes as much as they are defined in developmental terms.

Associated with the term of age is the concept of ‘life course’ which, unlike chronological age, refers to the socially constructed dimensions of age (Elder and Rockwell, 1979; Jones and Wallace, 1992; Valentine, 2003). Jones and Wallace argue

that ‘youth’ is not only defined in chronological terms, but equally importantly also in institutional terms. Through the curriculum schools administer what is referred to as ‘age-appropriate knowledge’ and in so doing define ‘the cognitive structures’ of young people (Bourdieu, 1984: 468). According to Bourdieu, ‘people’s cognitive structures are internalised embedded social structures agents draw on for making sense of their experiences’ (p. 468) and through socialisation processes, society sets different roles to different age groups. For example, the age of sixteen in the UK is a defining stage not necessarily just because of its chronological significance, but also because of the institutional arrangement of education, i.e. that children from a legal perspective are no longer required to be school bound. In other words, what is expected from different age groups is defined and sanctioned through social practices (Aapola, 2002; Lesko, 2012; Lippmann, 2008; Morss, 1996).

However, developmental milestones, such as making GCSE choices, transition to post-16, passing the age of minimum wage, or entering into marriage, are not only reflections of the norms, values and expectations of a prevailing socioeconomic context. There are agential dimensions to these processes. One key dimension of age in relation to children and young people is, for example, the development of identity in its broadest sense: learner, career and personal identities. That is, the question of ‘who do I want to become?’ is most pressing during this stage and with age, choice-making strategies, perception of structural factors and the meaning of their influences change. Of course, age has underlying cognitive and biological processes, but similarly the social and institutional dimensions, as discussed earlier, shape young people’s choice biographies.

Research suggests that the ways in which these age cohorts define their situations, experience their daily lives and interact with the outside world are age-related, but the role of age is often marked by complexities (Baird et al., 2008; Dornbusch, 1989; Elder and Rockwell, 1979; Gottfredson, 2002; Stokes and Wyn, 2007). This complexity is related to the tension between the view that aspiration is essentially developmental, i.e. that it changes with maturation, and the view that it is socially and contextually shaped (Furlong and Biggart, 1999). While developmental psychologists argue that aspiration is essentially developmental, sociologists of education suggest that, because age is more than a chronology of years, aspiration is mediated through a range of social and institutional practices. Most commentators agree that aspiration changes over time.

However, in the sociological literature its developmental (i.e. age-related) dimensions are often neglected in favour of its sociological ones, such as class, 'race', and gender (Brooks, 2005: 55) or in favour of its individual dispositions, such as academic abilities or what Bandura calls 'self-efficacy' (Bandura, 1995). In situations where the role of age is acknowledged, it tends to be represented more in descriptive rather than in analytic terms. This neglect is perhaps a response to the assumption that the very deployment of the term 'age' conflates the innate, individual drive for self-actualisation on the one hand, and the normativity of social expectations, on the other (Stokes and Wyn, 2007). The neglect can perhaps also be related to the fact that any analytical deployment of age for the study of aspirations is the business of developmental psychologists. Against this background, I begin this literature review by focussing on the role of age as an analytical tool in making sense of the changes in the choice-biographies of young people. I then go on to discuss how these changes are related to their growing up, not so much because of the chronological/developmental dimensions of age, but because it has socially or institutionally constructed dimensions (Aapola, 2002; Jones and Wallace, 1992; Wyn and Woodman, 2006).

Social dimensions of age

In their study of occupational aspirations of a 13-16 years old cohort, Furlong and Biggart (1999) found that 'ideas formed around aspirations in early childhood remain fairly constant into adulthood,' and continue by suggesting that 'for school-leavers the relationship between expectation and aspiration is stronger than that between social background and aspirations' (p. 29). According to Furlong and Biggart (1999), aspirations are formed in early childhood, often mediated by story books or television screens and remain unchanged up to the age of sixteen (p. 23). They conclude that 'the period of compulsory education is associated with a radical rethink of occupational future' (p. 24) and that the relationship between expectation and aspiration are close for children in secondary education (p. 25). Kao and Tienda (1998) make similar observations of the changing patterns of aspiration. They argue that, with time, aspirations change from the more abstract to the more concrete, reflecting the level of lived experience of the schooling process and the world of work.

Strong self-efficacy reinforces young people's feeling that they can achieve their expected outcomes. Moreover, the sense of being in control, the expectation and the

optimism that underpin aspiration tend to increase with maturation, particularly during adolescence and early adulthood. However, this may decline when a middle-aged person realises that his or her chances of promotion is in part subject to external factors (Furlong and Biggart, 1999). Gottfredson (1981) argues that at age fourteen young people begin to ‘orient to their internal unique self, develop personal interests, values and competencies as new tools of making sense of themselves and of others’ (p. 555). Anderson et al. (2005) found no clear differences between different age groups from the age of twenty, while other studies show that differences between expectations and aspirations decrease with maturation (Hegna, 2013; Jacobs et al., 1991). Jacobs et al. explain the drop in aspiration in terms of its dynamic nature, arguing that high early aspirations embody normative expectations which are subject to the dynamics of social changes, but not a static product of early-life socialisation (p. 628).

In addition to its developmental dimensions, age has social dimensions, which are cast in a number of discourses including ‘role theory’, discourses of identity, and discourses of life course (Elder and Rockwell, 1979; George, 1993; Jones and Wallace, 1992). This movement is mediated by what Elder calls ‘age graded social trajectories’ (Elder, 1995: 48). Like identity, aspiration is developmental and hence fluid, incomplete and ongoing (Stokes and Wyn, 2007), whereby as children grow older their conception of the world changes. Characteristic of their conception is a high level of aspiration (perhaps over-expectation), conviction of own efforts and a strong feeling of being in control over their destiny. It also appears from the literature that these characteristics have developmental dimensions, because clearly there is a limit to what the becoming young person can anticipate (Baird et al., 2008; Ginzberg, et al., 1951).

I suggest that the factor of age shapes life trajectories in three interrelated ways. First, the evolving nature of aspirations is closely related to the construction of identity and self-image and is thus also embodied in the biological growing up process. In the developmental perspective, it is held that as young people mature their perceptions change, because the socioeconomic context in which they make decisions takes on a different meaning for them. This change is in part a response to the associated social expectations and the role they assume in society. In formulating their career aspirations, young people are initially driven by individual biographies, which are partly embodiments of age-related perspectives, but also aspiration is often celebrated as an individual matter. This is to be understood within the aims of education as leading to

self-actualisation. Young people by their sheer age are bound to entertain ambitious expectations, because despite its perceived individualised nature career aspiration has both social and contextual dimensions. However, while the strength of the age (i.e. biological) argument in the formation of aspirations is that it transcends class, 'race' and gender differences, it loses its explanatory relevance because it is often subordinated to the sociological interpretation.

The second factor regarding age is that young people's development of concrete career plans is constrained by lack of lived experience. Consequently, they entertain idealistic aspirations early in their lives, driven by unbound imagination and much of their life plan is an extension of the present into the future (Anderson et al., 2005). Young people, particularly those in their adolescence, have the tendency of seeing themselves as unique, but as they grow older develop more consciousness of their classed, 'racialised', and perhaps even 'collectivised' or group identity. Underpinned by the limitations of age, children tend to overestimate their knowledge and capabilities, but underplay their shortcomings. One might argue that due to their limited knowledge and experiences children do not and perhaps even cannot, anticipate implications of their choices for their futures. Since the meaning aspiration makes to the young people has a developmental dimension (Baird et al., 2008), it can be contended that in early childhood it is often driven by abstract imagination, that is devoid of lived experience. Life experience forms the basis for young people's 'engagement with the world' Dewey, cited in Winch and Gingell (1999: 92); for making sense of it. And hence young people's ways of engaging with education become shaped by the experiences of their daily encounters with the 'imperatives of life situations' (Elder, 1975: 171), and these life experiences moderate the over-ambitiousness which characterises adolescence (Flammer, 1995: 86).

Third, the deployment of 'age' for making sense of young people's experiences in biological/developmental terms has some resonance with arguments about naturalness and linear progression (Lesko, 1996). This assumption of linearity is perhaps related to the fact that, as Stokes and Wyn (2007: 497- 498) argue, 'the social and developmental processes of age are conflated'. Much of the rationalisation of the school curriculum is, indeed, based on this assumption. In reality, much as school to work transition, or transition into adulthood for that matter might appear to progress linearly, for the majority of young people transition is marked by uncertainties, discontinuities and risks.

Stokes and Wyn (2007: 498) argue that ‘the assumptions of linearity and the conflation of biological and social development rest on normative assumptions about the nature of young people’s lives’ and in practice this is often not the case. That is, young people’s transition onto different paths (education, employment or leaving the parental home) is circular with many twists and turns, for as they develop through different life stages their preferences constantly change. Rarely do young people naturally progress or diligently follow childhood aspirations, because of the influences of a multitude of structural factors and the role of human agency.

Institutional dimensions of age: early childhood and choice dependency

The passage through the life course, then, is as much institutionalised as it is socialised (Bourdieu, 1984; Jones and Wallace, 1992; Wyn and Woodman, 2006), but these practices may possibly cohere with some underlying developmental processes. Arguably, the social and institutional practices in defining young people’s choice biographies are not as arbitrary as they seem, for children have to reach a certain cognitive maturation stage to be able to make critical life choices. It, however, remains unclear when this cognitive maturation stage ends. By the same token, one cannot confuse a child with an adult; yet despite the arbitrariness of the differentiated categories, most commentators agree that the adolescence and emerging adulthood are periods in young people’s life course full of uncertainties, in part, because of the impending assumption of full adult roles and responsibilities. In any case, cognitive maturation is often associated with adulthood, and beyond this stage talking about age in its developmental sense loses much of its relevance. It is substituted by lived experience with structural forces, access to relevant social capital and possession of cultural or human capital in shaping the construction of aspirations and affecting the life chances of individuals. It is partly the fuzziness of the boundary between adolescence and adulthood that renders the term ‘young people’ difficult to define. Quite often the differentiated categorisation could be described as arbitrary, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish between youth and adult (Stokes and Wyn, 2007; Valentine, 2003).

Consequently, while the influence of age is clear across different life stages, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact transition stages when changes (in the developmental

sense) take place in the young person's choice biography. This difficulty could perhaps be explained by the fact that growth and development come in degrees. As suggested earlier, age-related dimensions of aspiration are not only for the sociologists of education difficult to define, but the developmental psychologists too remain 'imprecise on how developmental processes lead to preferences or choice points' (Pryor and Taylor, 1989: 104). However, looking at age through an institutional lens, key decision-moments can be seen as institutionalised, whereby age-appropriate developments are linked to how society and social institutions are arranged. For example, one of the first critical junctions in a young person's life is deciding what to do after completing compulsory schooling at the age of sixteen, whereby school-leavers are presented with the opportunity to either consolidate or abandon tentative choices made before their school leaving exams. Upon leaving compulsory education, Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001: 3) report that young people in the UK considering further education become overwhelmed by around 15,000 courses offered in the UK further and higher education system leading to diverse careers and occupational 'landscapes' (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 1999). At this age, they are no longer legally required to be in education, but are socially expected to make critical choices about their futures (Taylor, 2005). Sixteen is too young an age for any young person to make sensible decisions, but making educational and career choices is in today's society an ineluctable action. That is, despite the recognition that 'the individual making such choice is an adolescent, still developing, both intellectually and emotionally', unfortunately, they make, or are expected to make critical decisions 'at a time when they are ill-fitted to do so' (Ginzberg et al., 1951: 6-7).

The role of age is in this respect indirect in that it is represented in the practical implications of early choices for later life through the logic of choice-dependency. According to the choice-dependency perspective, career decisions are consequential not only because decisions made cannot be reversed, but also because of the psychological commitments they engender. Such a view is based on the fact that choices by definition, even if made by others, are consequential. In fact, as Thomson et al. (2002: 340) point out, 'children have little control over the choices their parents make, yet they have to live with the consequences of these decisions'.

Furlong and Cartmel (1997: 6) compare choice-making in educational domains as like boarding a train, claiming that ‘opportunities to switch destinations other than disembark are limited’ once young people set out on their chosen pathways. Not only do they develop dependency on their earlier choices, but they also ‘develop affinity with their fellow passengers and become aware of their common experiences and destinations’. In such a situation, individual efforts to affect destinations other than to ‘disembark’ or through collective action become more or less impossible to bring to fruition. Although this metaphor overstates the choice-dependency implications of childhood choices, the point it makes is the paradoxical implication of the notion of choice itself, which in the words of Elster can be summed up as ‘we are free to choose our constraints’ (Elster, 1983: vii). Choices made at school-leaving age are often irreversible, ‘consequential’ (Giddens, 1991) and come with psychological commitments, which can become self-serving in that they trigger dependency. According to Polanyi and Prosch (1975: 4), choices once made take on different values simply ‘because we have chosen them’, which in the realm of education and career makes the cost of (re)training too high. This paradoxical choice-dependency situation (the freedom to choose dependency on choice) does not sit well with the more intrinsic nature of aspiration, which as suggested earlier, is subject to changes often at key ‘decision moments’: transition from school to further education, and subsequently to higher education. Choice-dependency theory reinforces the understanding that aspiration is shaped gradually through social/institutional processes and that educational trajectories are arranged in such a way that they exclude each other. Arguably, because of the way the provision of education is institutionally organised, one cannot simply turn back halfway through chosen educational pathways without emotional, psychological and even financial setbacks.

Since choices underlying the process of aspiration are by implication consequential, the role of the factor of age in this process is then both developmental and social: developmental in the sense of the limited capacity to make sense of social processes and social in that aspiration is mediated through the socialisation of children by their primary carers, professionals and peers. The factor of age is clearly bound up with the role of parents in the primary socialisation processes, whereby early socialisation informs a young person’s attitudes towards opportunities. For example, parents play an important part in this process through their role in their children’s early schooling in

terms of school choice (see Gewirtz et al., 1995). This interpretation of children's development of interests within the context of their family processes is a major theme in the theories of socialisation (more of this follows in the next section).

With the choice-dependency view, it is suggested that career aspirations are rooted in early childhood (Bandura, 2001; Freeman, 1993; Furlong and Biggart, 1999; Thomson et al., 2002; Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 1999; Jacobs et al., 1991). Bandura et al. (2001: 187) posit that although socio-contextual influences play a significant role in the construction of aspirations, early childhood experiences and choices 'shape the course of lives and which aspects of their potentials people cultivate, and which they leave undeveloped'. The view that early childhood experiences define transition into adulthood and into career trajectories has two implications. First, it calls into question the dynamic nature of aspiration by representing it as merely static and determined in early childhood. Children's choices, as suggested earlier under the choice-dependency view, as the reduction of their capacity to choose to mere biological immaturity, conceals the complexity of the choice process and consequently presenting choice in this way, runs the risk of reducing biographies of adolescence to mere childhood experiences. Second, given the argument that children have to live with the consequences of the decisions of adults in their lives (parents or professionals), explaining transition processes in terms of childhood experiences raises awkward questions about the existential postulates of aspirations, for it drives the agential role and the subjectivities of the developing young person into the background. The latter implication will be further discussed later in this chapter. In relation to the former concern, it has to be noted that aspiration discourses are premised on the assumption that they are by definition dynamic.

Conversely, it can be argued that children's conceptual understanding of their situation changes with maturation, and with these changes they 'become transformed', which eventually leads to alterations in their choice behaviour (Strauss, 1962: 66). For developmental psychologists, these temporal changes are marked by cognitive development and emotional maturing. In this view, aspiration is considered developmental and conceptualised as a 'a series of related transformations' (Strauss, 1962: 66), and since it also involves a certain level of planning one can argue that children, especially early in their lives, lack the skills required for setting realistic life goals (Nurmi, 1991: 28). According to Nurmi, efficiency in planning skills continues to

develop up to the early twenties. Aspiration is dynamic, the becoming young person is likely to forge new interests, or get their imaginations crystallised into realistic career plans. Moreover, it follows that although with maturation children might grow out of their initial ambitions, they nonetheless are likely to forge new ones. It is, however, also true that for some young people childhood aspirations persist into their adulthood, which suggests that, alongside age, individual dispositions of aptitude, abilities and perseverance similarly define the ways in which young people plan their life goals. More importantly, the continuity of some childhood dreams into adulthood raises critical questions about the role of life stage (in its developmental sense) in the transition process.

2.3 Structural dimensions of the formation of aspirations

A second dimension of the process of educational and career aspiration stems from macro-structural influences. The concept of 'structure' has not only been one of the most frequently used concepts in social science, but also one of the most elusive to define (Sewell, 1992: 1). In the following discussion, it refers to the arguments that the construction of aspiration is mediated by 'opportunity structures' (Roberts, 1977; 2009). According to this perspective, young people's choice behaviour, much as it might seem to be a personal matter as upheld by rational choice theory, is strongly structurally patterned. In order to explain young people's choice behaviour one needs to consider the structural aspects of educational provision and its organisation. Central to the analytic tools of the structuralist perspective is the deployment of the three key structural variables of class, 'race', gender and their overlapping dimensions. Here, the received wisdom is that these parameters shape the experiences, performance, aspirations and outcomes of young people (Gillborn, 1997). These variables are implicated in the power dynamics in society.

A core argument of the structuralist perspective is its focus on the role that the social background of individuals plays in mediating life-chances through existing educational or employment opportunity structures. In this view, it is held that individual actions are patterned by prevailing societal structures, because people inculcate behavioural patterns that accommodate hegemonic assumptions (Alexander, 1984; Blackledge and Hunt, 1985; Harker et al., 1990; Lehmann, 1993; Rubinstein, 2001; Sewell, 1992;

Willmott, 1999). Explaining social disparities in educational outcomes begins with the proposition that opportunities are not equally distributed (Ball, Maguire and Macrae, 2000; Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997). Some young people, particularly those from disadvantaged communities or historically oppressed groups, e.g. black and minority ethnic communities and those from working-class backgrounds, fail to live up to their potential (Riseborough, 1993). They lack the appropriate 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1986) to engage with structural forces that constrain their opportunities effectively and as a result hardly benefit from social, political, educational and economic opportunities. Others have the necessary means, i.e. power and privilege, to affect processes pertaining to their lives, and they enhance their privileged position by virtue of their advantaged position and hence are more agential. Structural influences come to bear on young people's life chances through family processes or through institutional processes; the two are interrelated.

Regarding family processes, a key theme emerging from the literature is that explanations for the differential educational aspirations and outcomes in later life can be traced back to variations in early socialisation and family strategies (Ball et al., 1999; Furlong et al., 1996; Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe, 1995). With this perspective, it is held that middle class parents possess a positional advantage by, to say the least, merely reinforcing what their children are taught at school or guiding them instrumentally through the educational system with which they are, relative to their working class counterparts, more familiar. It then follows that while children from better off backgrounds are more likely to get on well with their schooling, all children from deprived social backgrounds can hope for is just to get by, and not get behind. The importance of the family role in educational and career choice-making, although probably not visible at the school leaving stage could have been laid in the child's primary socialisation. However, it is not only previous decisions at the family level that are crucial, for those taken by educational bureaucracies equally shape young people's career aspirations (Halsey et al., 1980: 176). In their transition into adulthood immigrant youth are confronted with multiple problems, some of which emanate from their ethnicity and migration histories, while others pertain to the prevailing economic, social and educational opportunity structures. Studies that explore how structural dynamics shape youth transition and intergenerational social mobility emphasise the role of educational and social institutions, often in their oppressive forms (Willis, 1977;

Bowles and Gintis, 1976). In this view, transitions from school to work for young people from working class or ethnic minority backgrounds are often characterised by mismatches and disappointments. It is at this transition stage that the crisis for these particular young people often starts, whereby it is suggested that schools fail to prepare them for further educational or career paths.

According to the structuralist view, inequality in educational outcomes cannot be explained by differences in intelligence, but in terms of the structural factors of racism, classism and gender, whereby prejudice, poor teacher expectations and the related self-fulfilling prophecy, condemn certain sections of the society to poor educational achievements and hence, also to poor career prospects (Meighan and Harber, 2007). The matter is made more complex by the interaction between schooling and family process. There is a substantial body of research showing that families from different social backgrounds follow different strategies for engaging with the schooling process (Allat, 1993; Gewirtz et al., 1995). For example, Gewirtz et al., point out that privileged groups strengthen their social position by choosing the best schools for their children. Moreover, they effectively guide their children through the education system and by virtue of their cultural and financial position are able to exploit structural processes to their advantage. The same cannot be said of working-class people, who being materially or culturally disadvantaged, are less able or willing to exploit choice-making systems to gain social advantage and may disengage from the educational market altogether, thus missing out on the opportunity that 'learning society policies' (Tlili and Wright, 2005) try to promote and the very outcome liberalisation of the education system is meant to bring about. Thus, Bank notes that to understand class differences in school achievement better one would have to take into account how children are socialised into their family and school settings. He argues that in those early days children develop an achieving mindset (Banks, 1971: 109), which they dearly need to succeed in their subsequent schooling career. The role that families play in the school career of children is a recurrent theme in the social class debate, one well-summarised by Ball et al. (1999) as 'instilling a particular learner identity' in the child – a view further reinforced by the general conception that schools promote the cultural etiquettes of the middle class. In a similar vein, Furlong et al. (1996: 562) contend that through the process of primary socialisation, children 'come to share the assumptive worlds of their parents'.

Schooling exerts its structuring influence through family process in subtle ways. Casting social inequalities in terms of structural mechanisms, Bowles and Gintis (1976) claim that the schooling system favours the powerful and the privileged. For Bowles and Gintis, schools, mirroring the hierarchical relationship prevalent in the capitalist system of production, instil young people with attitudes concomitant with the prevailing socioeconomic structure, and mould their personalities and consciousness accordingly. More recently, Hallinan (2001: 57) adopting this reading of structuralism, similarly notes that 'schools channel different learning opportunities to students depending on their ascribed or achieved characteristics' and prepare them for different career routes. Hallinan (2001) has distinguished several ways to illustrate how social structures impede the educational success of minority groups: effects of social stratification; school related factors; teacher expectation, labelling, and the creation of ability groups have contributed to the low achievement of black minorities. Rather than eliminating social disparities, schools, in this respect, have the unintended consequence of strengthening inequalities by favouring those with power and privilege (Bowles and Gintis, 1976: 123). These processes then result in the fact that life chances become marked by deep class divisions and a 'racial' divide (Reay, 2001; Gillborn, 1997).

From a structuralist perspective, particularly a Marxist-oriented one, the marginalisation of individuals from underprivileged backgrounds reflects the impact of schooling processes, whereby the cultural etiquettes of the privileged middle-class are promoted. Those from working class backgrounds fail to benefit from educational opportunities, because schools favour those already well-equipped with the required academic dispositions or material resources. For the unprivileged groups to realise their ambitions, they have to adopt different values and adapt their engagement strategies to the hidden curriculum of the schooling process, in other words, renounce their authentic selves. In the structuralist view it is held that people from different social classes develop different aspirations, not necessarily because of their individual biographies, but precisely because of the structural inequalities inherent in the way society and social institutions are arranged (Apple, 2000; Ball et al., 1999; Gewirtz et al., 1995; McDermott, 1987; Furlong et al., 1996; Willis, 1977). Of course, job opportunities run along class lines, with highly skilled jobs still largely dominated by the middle-class, while people of working-class backgrounds continue to fill low skilled and low paid jobs. It follows, arguably, that the social backgrounds of social and physical location,

ethnicity and gender remain crucial independent factors in mediating the development of choice biographies (Atkinson and Kintrea, 2004; Lehman, 2004).

Thus, according to the structuralist perspective, it is held that an individual's outcomes, to a large extent, result from structural forces beyond what they, particularly those from some socio-cultural groups, can affect. That is, people internalise socially constructed realities, such as 'race' and class differences, in such a way that, depending on the presenting situation, they either submit or rebel, or do both (Willis, 1977). However, the cultural explanations approach offers another outlook on differential outcomes for different groups, cast in terms of a 'culture of deficiency', a culture of resistance, self-marginalising, or in terms of conformism. From the structuralist perspective, it is maintained that understanding the aspirations of young people from immigrant communities remains incomplete without the structural variables of 'race', class and gender being taken into account.

For example, the reproduction thesis problematises the view that young people innocently make autonomous career choices, for aspirations are viewed as internalised perceptions of objective possibilities (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). With this perspective, it is held that young people's subjective perceptions of opportunities are shaped by their social experiences through micro-social relationships and 'location in their life courses' (Brannen and Nilsen, 2002: 520). Jacobs et al. (1991) note that 'informed by an individual's past experiences, *habitus* shapes one's understanding of both the present and future' (p. 612). In Bourdieu's terms, attitudes towards education and experiences with the education system are strongly related to young people's *dispositions* and their *positions* within society. According to Bourdieu (1977) 'every established order tends to produce (to very different degrees and with very different means) the naturalisation of its own arbitrariness' (p. 164). For him, the structural imposition is reflected in the dominant class's socialising of other members of society (e.g. through education) into adopting the elite's values and norms, so that these others misrecognise them as their own. The disadvantaged groups' adaptation to hegemonic norms and values merely serves to reinforce the structural reproduction of the system that privileges the already dominant. From this perspective, aspirations result from an internalised objective reality. Although this stance may not explain why young people of immigrant backgrounds entertain lofty aspirations early in their lives (Warikoo, 2011), it nonetheless explains the discrepancy between their early over-expectation and

subjective aspirations, on the one hand, and the objective outcome of their educational careers, on the other.

It is not, however, only the patterning impact of social structures that is central to the ways in which the concept of ‘structuralist explanation’ of differentials in educational and career outcomes for different groups is used in this study. This is because culture similarly defines social actions. The concept of culture and its role in the construction of educational and career identity will be discussed more fully in the last section of this chapter, but for the purpose at hand it needs to be pointed out that structure and culture are two distinct concepts, neither of which can be reduced to the other. What the structuralist explanation refers to is the constraining impact of institutional and opportunity structures embodied in prevailing ideologies and the job market (macro-level factors). Variabilities in youth transition result from processes operating at the macro-structural level – particularly those relating to the dual variables of racism and classism. Clearly, discrimination and prejudice negatively impact on the educational and career outcomes of certain sections of society (Meighan and Harber, 2007). Theories drawing on culture, in contrast, refer to the social pressures emanating from norms, expectations and sanctions common among certain social groups (contextual or meso-level factors). I discuss these further in Section 2.4.

The structuralist view does not merely describe how social inequality is shaped by macro-level processes, for it also offers ways of critically engaging with these processes. For example, some of the theoretical models drawing on structuralism, such as the reproduction thesis influenced by the work of Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), have proved instrumental in deconstructing how macro-level structural factors pertain to micro-level social processes and define who gets what in such a classed and racialised country as the UK. This brings us to the second view on the implications of structuralism. Exposing the marginalising effects of institutions and institutionalised symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1989), this stance advances the claim that in order to realise a more just society, legitimated institutional processes that disproportionately disadvantage some groups should be made more accommodating. As Alexander (1984: 14) argues, ‘one of the great accomplishments of instrumental structuralism is that it has demonstrated how material deprivation sets limits to individual actions’. As a result of this understanding of how institutions and power relations are bound up with maintaining social inequalities, significant changes have been realised in making

educational opportunities more accessible to a larger number of people. However, while access to educational opportunities has improved remarkably (education is no longer for the privileged few), and its take-up by all social groups has dramatically increased, as an instrument for closing the gap in social opportunities it still remains largely ineffective. Moreover, discrepancies in patterns of intergenerational social mobility across socio-cultural groups continue to persist.

Critics of neoliberal government policy initiatives aimed at improving the life-chances of young people agree that despite changes to the provision of education the historic typologies of privileged and underprivileged continue to exist in the present day UK economy (Bradley and Devadason, 2008; Crozier, 2014; Furlong, 2009; Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; Gewirtz et al., 1995; Macrea, Maguire and Ball, 1997). Furlong and Cartmel (2007) argue that the division of jobs and job opportunities remains along class lines, with high skilled jobs still largely being dominated by the middle class, while people of working class backgrounds continue to fill low skilled and low paid jobs. Bates (1993), for example, contends that competition in the labour market is becoming ever more fierce and that this competition ‘brings both qualifications and underlying social and cultural attributes more forcibly into play in selection processes, with the consequence that the barriers of class and gender are more difficult to overcome’ (p. 25). Such continuity of social inequalities partly explains the deep rootedness of structural inequalities in the British education system and consequently also in the job market. Intergenerational transmission of advantaged or disadvantaged positions is not necessarily a reproduction on the part of unresponsive groups, but a reproduction of the same basic tenets of the capitalist ideology at the heart of the economy (Croll, 2004; Reay, 2001). This point is illustrated by Gewirtz’s et al.’s (1995) observation that liberalisation of the education system has created more choices for those already able to exercise these. A core theme of these arguments is that attempts to make education more accessible to all social and cultural groups are not paralleled by improvement in employment opportunities.

As Willis (1977) has indicated in his research, young people of working class backgrounds tend to live out the expectations held of them. They often rebel and opt themselves out of opportunities, but their actions may not necessarily indicate autonomy in the choice-making process. Rather, their actions signify the agential dimension of failure, i.e. that young people opt themselves out of social or educational processes so as

to show their active involvement in their life choices. Thus one can argue that apathy or rebellion are partly actively pursued, but in essence emanate from the structural organisation of society. Regarding the latter point, the young might appear to isolate themselves, yet the true nature of their isolation is indeed embedded in the prevailing power relationships. As Bourdieu and Passeron (1977: 157) argue ‘the subjective expectation of these classes is not independent of the objective probability’. Similarly, in contemporary times it makes a difference for a young person whether they try to achieve and fail and assume or conclude that their failure is due to external factors or whether they do not try and assume that their failure is a product of lack of choice. This is where the reflective role of the agent comes into the equation and I turn to this dimension in the following section.

2.4 Subjectivities of the formation of aspirations

Theorisations of aspirations have recently seen a shift from - to use Wrong’s (1999) term - an ‘over-socialised’ conception of aspiration, towards a more reflexive approach in which identity, subjectivity and the role of human agency take a central role. This shift is associated with a number of theoretical developments or conceptual frameworks, including poststructuralism, agency and the individualisation thesis found, among others, in late modernity discourses (Beck, 1992; Bhopal and Preston, 2012; Evans, 2007; Giddens, 1991; Heinz, 2009; Tlili, 2007). The shift also involves a more context-sensitive form of theorising educational differentials which rejects the mechanistic approach to explaining inequality in educational outcomes, and instead focuses on the agent’s practical knowledge in the context of the lived world as well as on the fluidity, plurality and changing nature of the social one (Gewirtz and Cribb, 2003: 69). This focus on the role of human agency is an attempt to theorise the ‘contradictions and paradoxes’ (Raffo and Reeves, 2000: 148) faced by the developing young person.

For the purpose at hand, poststructuralism is understood as a theoretical framework that focuses on the role of subjectivity, reflexivity, meaning, identity and human agency in understanding young people’s ‘transition behaviour’ (Evans, 2007: 86). A focus on processes such as globalisation and migration, for instance, bring a different dimension to bear on the social reproduction explanations in which the role of human agency is driven to the background in favour of the imposing social/structure relations (Gewirtz and Cribb, 2003). In this view, it is argued, for example, that individuals respond

differently to structural inequalities. As is discussed in the next section, immigrant groups, for instance, respond to structural inequalities differently. It is against this background that the structuralist approach of explaining differential and career outcomes proves insufficient on its own, and thus, ‘a more complex and context sensitive engagement’ (Gewirtz and Cribb, 2003: 246) is required, which takes account of and better conceptualises, the migration and historical narratives of communities not traditionally reproduced in stratified European society.

The development of the poststructuralist theoretical lens is inspired by responses to the tendency for the grand theorising of structural arguments (Gewirtz and Cribb, 2003: 252). While the structuralist perspective offers insightful explanations of the macro-social processes which shape people’s perspectives and which to some extent even define their life chances, it does not fully account for social dynamics at a micro-level, and neither does it adequately account for intra-group differences (Gewirtz and Gribb, 2003; Giroux, 1983). Gewirtz and Cribb (2003), in their critical reading of reproduction theory, conclude that its early versions were premised on the idea of grand theorising of structural inequalities. These commentators suggest the changing context of society calls into question the central tenets of the reproduction model. By contrast, the poststructuralist view holds that the individual is not to be seen as a passive recipient of external influences, but central to the construction of their own choice biographies.

Poststructuralism seeks to problematise the collective dimensions of the formation of aspirations and instead foregrounds the active role of the individual in writing their choice biographies. It raises critical questions about collectivities and the normative stance presented in the preceding section. Deconstructing collectivities, it focuses on the fragmented nature of youth transition, advancing the perspective that despite the fact that the discussions around the formation of educational and career aspirations evoke a sense of sequential, structured progression, the construction of aspirations is imbued with discontinuities and fluidity. Critical consciousness and subjectivity of the human agency are the key definers of people’s destinations, not the reified macro-structural processes, nor the essentialising age-related discourses. Through this human agency discourse, it is contended that, like identity, choice has become fragmented and fluid because in the contemporary labour market the only thing that is certain is uncertainty. Hence, employability has become the daily concern of the critical agent (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006). Concern about employability is, by definition, an individual level

response to the fast changing labour market in which people need to adjust to the globalised demand for particular skills continuously (Evans, 2007). Due to the uncertainties in the labour market, young people increasingly tend to resist normative social structures, negotiate risks and reflexively construct multiple identities for different occasions.

One of the key themes in poststructuralism is the shift of analysis from seeing individuals being at the receiving end of structural influences to putting the individual at the centre of the analysis as an active agent. This seems to have made way for an individualised way of making choices, with group identity and collectivities struggling to hold their place in defining people's social mobility. Engagement with the education process is more than the 'acquisition of knowledge; it is a dialectical process of constructing an identity' (Avis, 2006: 347) and seeking social justice and recognition (Vincent, 2003). In the poststructuralist view, people no longer remain members of static communities, but depending on the context, they can join different ones, for belonging and identity have become fluid. It is in this context that young people form their longer term aspirations and make their immediate choices. Neoliberal policies towards the curriculum pursued by conservative governments are geared towards individual responsibilities, with education being considered as a commodity, while families and their children are seen as consumers (Ball et al. 2000; Gewirtz et al., 1995).

Liberaralised educational policies are concerned with what Avis (2006: 343) calls 'individualisation and self-responsibilisation'. In this culture of individualism that has now become part of late modernity, contemporary young people, regardless of their racial or social background, are equally subjected to the whimsical influences of the commoditisation of lifestyles (music, entertainment, designer outfits and mass media). Indeed, influences of these developments transcend class, 'race' and gender divisions, and one might even push this view further to suggest that life chances are similarly a product of individual efforts. Giddens (1991) argues that choice making in late modernity has become fragmented and fluid. It has also become individualised in that young people are expected to write their own biographies (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991) and consequently, late modernity discourses focus on subjectivity, reflexivity and individual biography (Beck, 1992; Evans, 2002; Giddens, 1991). In particular, aspiration and choice-making are regarded as intrinsically subjective. Moreover, one of

the themes of the individualist perspective is the role of 'human agency', which the social reproduction perspective either ignores or underplays. Giroux (1983), being critical of the structuralist tradition, lays out in his resistance theory that working-class students consciously choose to disengage from the schooling process. As such, he revives the role of human agency, shifting the emphasis away from the structuring impact of educational institutions, policies, power inequalities and processes operating at the macro-level to explain social inequalities and differences in youth transition. For Giroux, 'neglecting the role of the human agent and the importance of consciousness and experience as the primary determinants in shaping history' (1983: 129) is tantamount to denying the dialectical relationships between structure, culture and agent. Drawing attention to these shortcomings, he assigns an active role to human agency in 'mediating links between structural determinants and lived effects' (1983: 285). In this theory, Giroux not only foregrounds the role of the critical agent in affecting his or her destinies, but he also outlines how the complex interaction between culture, class, families and schools generates contradictions. Consequently, he suggests that one has to ask critical questions about the taken-for-granted structural influences as all-encompassing determinants that reduce the agent's social mobility to fate.

As Bates argues, 'human agency is not an entirely malleable resource and people do not readily accept what they deem to be undesirable' (Bates, 1993: 29); besides, contemporary labour market conditions have hit young people harder than any other social group (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; Moreau and Leathwood, 2006). Thus, this view on human agency suggests that choice reflects something much deeper than simply attaining certain outcomes; it is an individual project of self-realisation (Giddens, 1991). The human agency discourse, with its emphasis on the role of the reflexive agent, recognises that the development of aspirations is not merely determined by socialisation or structural influences, but rather, foregrounds the role of the individual in writing their own individual choice biographies (Rudd, 1997). Rudd, in his review of the theoretical developments of youth studies, argues that socialisation theories draw much on 'macro-sociological perspectives', making little allowance for subjectivities and individual agency. The shift from a more macro-sociological approach to a more micro-sociological one coincided with the increasing youth unemployment in the late 1970s and 1980s. According to Rudd (1997: 258), much of

the literature focuses on the ‘individualisation’ of choices, but the aspect of ‘feeling in control over school to work transition’ is rarely touched upon.

Within the discourse of late modernity old regularities and patterns of youth transitions have become ever more complex and unpredictable (Furlong and Carmel, 2007). While arguably choices made in the past largely shape future actions, best captured in the train analogy that ‘opportunities to switch destinations’ are limited, in the postmodern world it is similarly accepted that ‘young people face new risks and new opportunities’ (p. 15), which make it necessary for them to find innovative ways of dealing with adversities. To deal with risks and uncertainties, then, young people are becoming ever more concerned about employability than merely developing a distinct career pathway. According to Heinz (2009: 400), because the very process of transition implies uncertainties, young people will tend to minimise these ‘by applying biographical experiences which, however, may create the risk of not being suited to the specific situational context’. This tendency of risk reduction is particularly ever more pressing, because in the contemporary youth labour market individual skills and educational attainments are crucial in facilitating labour market entry, while the collectivised transitions once so central to understanding social reproduction have weakened (Furlong and Carmel, 2007: 28). Although this model does not fully explain the lofty expectations of young people early in their lives (see Chapter 6), it perfectly explains choice strategies young people adopt later in their lives. For, as they accumulate life experiences and become familiar with the subtleties of societal power relations, they evaluate their probabilities of achieving their desired outcomes and accordingly adjust these to what is realistically accessible to them.

The poststructuralist view problematises the distinction between subjective perceptions of opportunities and autonomous decision-making (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007) as it advances the notion that quite often transition is not necessarily a simple natural progression from one stage to the next. That is, it is a fragmented journey characterised by risky and critical crossroads with uncertain destinations, best described as a continuum, at one end of which, the formation of aspirations is informed by individual level factors (i.e. passion and interest), and at the other, by contextual and structural factors (i.e. opportunity structures, which refers here to what is realistically and

objectively possible). Choice biography is an integral theme of the poststructuralist discourses within which agents are expected actively and reflexively to construct their identities through life choices (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991). In this view, aspiration is conceptualised as an individual responsibility, and young people are portrayed as thoughtful, reflexive agents able to write their own choice-biography. Like Bourdieu's *habitus*, the concept of 'choice biography' bridges individual and social preferences, or individualises social preferences as it foregrounds the role of the individual.

However, according to Furlong and Cartmel (1997), life in late modernity involves subjective discomfort and uncertainties that make young people struggle to establish adult identities or maintain coherent biographies. They may develop strategies to overcome such a struggle, yet their social mobility remains highly structured. That is, social class, 'race' and gender continue to be key definers of young people's experiences and outcomes in a range of life contexts. For, while much has changed for them in terms of prolonged dependency, diverse transition routes, expanded educational opportunities and unemployment, the social location of the individual still significantly defines their life-chances and inequalities patterned by class position still persist (Borjas, 1992; Furlong, 2009; Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Gillborn et al., 2012; Lehmann, 2004; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2007). As Giddens (1991) notes, in late modernity agents have lost their agential influence as 'we have no choice but to choose' (p. 81). Giddens's argument is that choice making, individual as it may look, is not wholly freed up from the influences of social institutions and hence, not made by autonomous agents. A major problem with the poststructuralist view is that it evokes a sense of equality in access and in outcome. Clearly, ambitious and idealistic expectations driven by the culture of individualisation do not materialise for many. For, while educational policies of consumerism and curriculum reform encourage autonomy, hegemonic structures of inequality are ever more present in setting limits to what is realistically achievable (Ball et al., 2000).

2.5 Contextual dimensions of the formation of aspirations

To generate further insight into the construction of aspirations, I now turn to the literature on ethnic minority young people. I begin the discussion with the general

statement that in the sociology of education there is a growing body of work on the experiences of young people of minority ethnic communities with the education process showing differential outcomes that could not be explained in structuralist terms only (Archer and Francis, 2007; Ball, Reay, and David, 2002; Mason, 2003; Modood, 2004; Vermeulen and Perlmann, 2000; Warikoo, 2011). This growing body of literature represents the emergence of the contextual approach to education and career making, which is a response to the more deterministic tones of the structuralist perspectives on one side and the anti-essentialist tendencies of the agency discourses on the other. Problems facing these young people become pronounced during their transition from compulsory education to further or higher education or to the world of work (Archer and Yamashita, 2003; Bradley and Taylor, 2004). The question of how best to understand differences in educational outcomes and in the way young people engage with educational opportunities, has been a central focus of much educational research since differentials in outcome and aspirations were first raised as a serious concern in the late 1950s (Gillborn, 1997). McDermott puts it succinctly:

There is a preoccupation among us: Because we claim to offer good education to all and because many minority people seem to reject it, we are plagued with the question of ‘What is it with them anyway?’ or ‘What is their situation that school seems to go so badly?’ (McDermott, 1987: 361-362)

These questions have indeed kept educational researchers busy for a long time and the need for an alternative explanation for differential educational outcomes among minority ethnic young people is more than ever before pressing. Research in both the US and the UK has shown that the educational outcomes for different minority ethnic youth vary, thus raising serious questions about the limited scope of structuralist explanations, on the one hand, and the agential approach, on the other (Bradley and Taylor, 2004; Gillborn, 1997; Gillborn et al., 2012; Modood, 2004; Zhou and Bankston, 1994). That is, the cases of such young people make the deployment of any one theoretical perspective problematic. Much has been said about the characteristics of the young people from these communities, but the themes that repeatedly feature in this particular literature are attitudes, orientations, experiences, aspirations, expectations and outcomes. These themes, in conjunction with the dimensions of age, individual biographies, family strategies and community processes, define the ways in which these young people engage with the educational process.

The contextual approach refers to the deployment of meso-level factors including family dynamics, community relations, social relationships and migration narratives as a way of bridging the analytical gap between the more structural and the more agential explanations. The emergence of the contextual approach is also related to the fact that research among young people from ethnic minority groups shows variable levels of engagement with schooling and differential outcomes. Although social class differences in social mobility have remained stable, variability in the intergenerational mobility of ethnic minority communities has bewildered educational researchers. Often, Asian young people are presented in educational research as adopting a 'conforming' attitude towards education, while black young people, boys in particular, are often portrayed as a 'problem' group with an anti-school culture (Mac an Ghail, 1991).

It is argued that however much class differences seem to be static there is a parallel process of change, however piecemeal, for society and social relations by their very nature are dynamic (Gewirtz and Cribb, 2003; Giroux, 1983). Changes defying social class and 'race' expectations are well captured in the empirical question of why the youth of some ethnic minority communities have better educational outcomes, while others succumb to the negative influences of deprived neighbourhoods. A case in point is the positive outcomes for some ethnic minority groups, such as Indian and Chinese young people. That is, the stories of these groups are prime examples that reflect the possibility of group dynamism. The challenge is to identify the specific factors underlying such group dynamism and how they, in the words of Niekerk (2000: 196), facilitate positive change for some (some push each other up), yet impede the social mobility of others (others pull each other down). One such model is one encapsulated within social capital thinking (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Croll, 2004; Dwyer et al., 2006; Kao and Rutherford, 2007; Lin, 2001; Putnam, 2000), where the facilitative role of social networks is considered a major contributor to the variability of social mobility among young people from ethnic minority groups.

Although the more established explanatory models, such as the reproduction thesis (structural level factors) or rational action theories (individual level factors), have much relevance for making sense of educational outcomes and aspirations of young people from immigrant communities, in this research it is argued that to understand the aspirations of those from such backgrounds one would need to take into account contextual variables, i.e. the historical social practices and pre-migration biographies

(Lauglo, 2000; Modood, 2004; Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993; Zhou, 1997; Zhou and Bankston, 1994). Zhou (2005) puts this issue clearly:

Much of the intellectual debate on ethnic differences is between the cultural perspective – emphasizing the role of internal agency and the extent to which ethnic culture fit the requirements of the mainstream society – and the structural perspective – emphasizing the role of social structure and the extent to which ethnic groups are constrained by the broader stratification system and networks of social relations within that system. (Zhou, 2005: 131)

Central to this debate is the contextualisation of the patterns of and processes underlying intergenerational social mobility. It is suggested that the social capital model can accommodate these processes, for it seeks explanations of social mobility not only in terms of the structural inequalities in society, but also at the intersection between structural factors and the cultural attributes of a given community. Emphasising soft variables, such as social networks, values, norms and relationships that facilitate actions of individuals, Coleman argues that social relations matter (Coleman, 1988). Social capital, according to him, inheres in social networks, for it involves relationships through which vital information is channelled and shared as well as through which mutual support is mobilised and, most importantly, group consciousness is informed. For Coleman (1988: 105), ‘effective norms are instrumental in averting external negative influences which plague much of young people’s participation in education and employment in contemporary youth subculture’. Families embedded in what he calls closure networks are able to affect positively the transition of their young people into adulthood in two ways: first, through intergenerational transmission of aspirations and attitudes, and second, through the enforcement of these norms by adults in the community. In the former case, his take on the concept is that it is indispensable for children’s cognitive development. In the latter, Coleman argues that social cohesion, where members of a given community look out for each other, plays a crucial role in the creation of human capital in the developing young person, i.e. it facilitates successful transition into adulthood and the taking up of educational and employment opportunities. Zhou and Bankston’s (1994) study of the Vietnamese in the UK supports this view.

Coleman (1988) uses the concept of social capital particularly in his studies of educational underachievement, maintaining that the individual misfortune of people with a working-class background is often related to the ineffectiveness of their social relationships. According to this view, social capital is an effective substitute for financial and cultural forms. In his attempt to explain the educational underachievement of different social groups, Coleman studied school dropouts by comparing Catholic schools, which he categorised as high in social capital, with public and private schools, both of which he categorised as low in social capital. He concluded that dropout rates in Catholic schools were much lower than for both public and affluent private schools, because they enjoy the kinds of richer social relationships that are more generally found in faith-based schools, which, he contends, compensate for the students' lack of financial capital. The core of his position is that, irrespective of their material position, what members of closed communities enjoy and share is trusting mutual support, which is the glue that holds them together. For Coleman, the social structures of close-knit communities create the kinds of conditions conducive to the smooth intergenerational transmission of values and norms. In this respect, Coleman views social capital as enabling, in that it assists the individual to achieve outcomes that are otherwise difficult, such as the educational success of children (Coleman, 1988: 98).

While Coleman regards social capital as a democratic good accruable to all regardless of their social background, for Bourdieu it is an asset accessible only to the privileged who already own other forms (economic or cultural). For Bourdieu social capital is interlinked with class structure (Croll, 2004; Field, 2003). As Field (2003: 14) argues, Bourdieu's thinking on social capital is part of his wider distinctive work on '*habitus*' and 'field' in which he discusses how social inequality is produced and reproduced through differential access to a form of cultural capital that is imbued with the prevailing ideology and power structures. Emphasising the structuring impact of social structures, Bourdieu sees that social and economic opportunities are significantly created and conditioned within the social space one occupies. Although his conceptualisation of social capital addresses some of the crucial caveats left by Coleman, i.e. class and power relations and ensuing social inequalities, his emphasis on the subjective experiences of the objective structures similarly seems to underplay the role of the agent. For, Bourdieu's development of the concept seems to be rooted within

the structuralist tradition of sociology with a particular focus on the historical formation and development (and to some extent even continuation) of class struggle.

Social capital theory has been subjected to much critical scrutiny (Baron, Field and Schuller, 2000; Dika and Singh, 2002; Fine, 2001; Tlili and Obsiye, 2013). For example, Fine contends that it offers nothing new as an explanatory tool, and represents merely a colonising of existing social science theories. Others, like Morrow (1999), point to the normative and ethno-centric tendency of social capital theorising. For, Coleman (1988) argues that both large family size and single parenthood have negative implications for the acquisition of social capital at a family level, which Morrow (1999: 753) considers too ethnocentric. According to him, it ignores the existence of different family structures, including extended family forms in which family members outside the nuclear family have roles to play in raising children. It also implies that disadvantaged groups wishing to improve their life-chances should reconsider how they engage with social and structural processes. By emphasising the positive role of social networking in the educational performance of children, for example, as noted above, Coleman seems to suggest that the individual misfortunes of people with a working-class background are bound up with the ineffectiveness of their social relationships. In this respect, social capital at best searches for failures and what people lack and at worst states nothing but the obvious – that success breeds success. In this respect, Coleman's deployment of the concept on the basis of its functional utility appears tautological – i.e. that social capital is only identified when and if it works (Lin, 2001: 34).

An important assumption underlying this particular take on social capital theory is the existence of harmonious relationships between members of a given minority ethnic community. Whilst this view has much credence, the idea of social capital as a network of relations where members of a given community can draw on the instrumental value of these networks for their personal development has some limitations. To begin with, social capital, at least in the way Coleman has formulated it, ignores power dynamics within society, for social relations are bound up with power differences and inequalities. According to Foley and Edwards (1999: 146) the 'use value' of social capital depends on awareness of the existence of such social resources, which can be acquired through social relationships. Neither the knowledge of the existence of appropriable social

resources nor the ability to appropriate these resources is equally distributed amongst the different members of the community. That is, some people are more able than others to 'convert the raw material of social resources into tangible social capital' (Foley and Edwards, 1999: 146).

A second weakness of much social capital thinking is its normative stance towards social embeddedness. It postulates that being embedded in one's own community network is advantageous. Embeddedness, as a form of social capital, is presented as a resource indispensable for immigrant young people in their negotiation of the cultural and structural factors which have a bearing on their lives. Some critics, however, argue that embeddedness is not necessarily advantageous to all under all conditions. For example, Portes (1998) suggests that Coleman's version of social capital, where it is portrayed as an indispensable resource for otherwise under-resourced communities, is problematic. Drawing on the work of Putnam, he distinguishes between the bridging and bonding forms of social capital. This distinction is of great importance for understanding the nature and quality of social embeddedness and its relationship to the social mobility of individuals as well as groups of people (Field, 2003). Bonding is a form of social capital often found in close-knit relationships; it is inward looking. Portes maintains that social embeddedness in one's own minority ethnic community gives rise to the risk of free-riding, i.e. that not all members of the community will contribute to the collective good and hence, ambitious individuals do not benefit from such bonding forms of social capital. In addition to the levelling mechanism characteristic of close-knit communities, another problem of the closed circuit is the circulation of either outdated information, or information that is inward-oriented, rather than outward-oriented (Portes, 1998: 6). Conversely, bridging, also a form of social capital, refers to the advantages accruing to the individual from linking up with others outside one's own community (Field, 2003). These two forms of social capital serve different purposes for different people in different situations. Bonding, for instance, is crucial for children's cognitive development in their early primary socialisation. Needless to say that embeddedness and bonding within one's own community network facilitate the nurturing of certain distinct cultural traits, i.e. language, belief and value systems, which are crucial for the development of personal identity and self-positioning within the wider society.

It is suggested that in the face of common threats, like discrimination, a different form of social capital - group solidarity – comes into existence. This form of social capital is often built around the feeling that faring well in the mainstream society can only be realised if people act collectively. Collective action resulting from such a feeling comes in two forms: a positive and instrumental engagement with the prevailing social structures through the mobilisation of meagre resources available to the community in question. But it is also likely that a sort of introverted position is taken to oppose the mainstream society. This position involves disengaging with prevailing structures and/or rebelling against them. Individual success, in the latter view, is seen as weakening vital group solidarity. According to Portes (1998: 17), this process keeps ‘downtrodden groups in place and forces the more ambitious to escape from it’. That is to say, hardworking members of the community bear the burden of the less active in the community through the existence of shared normative structures (1998: 16). The ‘levelling mechanism’ is one such negative aspect. That is to say, being embedded within a particular community obstructs, rather than facilitates, individual social mobility. Further, Portes talks about the suffocating impact of close-knit communities where individual autonomy and privacy are foregone. Finally, the persistence of strong group solidarity presupposes that opportunities available outside the community, e.g. employment, support or even information, are limited (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993: 1336). As soon as people feel they can turn to support from resources outside their immediate minority ethnic groups or social security network, they tend to utilise such opportunities.

Clearly, social networks have other kinds of negative dimensions, particularly when these are used by criminals for gang-related activities (Field, 2003) or where young people revolt against the school system to show peer group solidarity (Lauglo, 2000: 159). Arguably, young people’s contextual milieu is made up of different family and community networks; hence, they generally subscribe to different and in some cases even conflicting values. Such simultaneous embeddedness in different and sometimes antagonistic social groups sets the context in which they either constructively engage with the opportunities available to them, or choose to rebel against them. A key component in social capital thinking is the role of culture. Originating from the field of

anthropological educational research, the use of 'culture' to explain differentials in educational outcomes between different socioeconomic groups has been rife since the 1960s (Foley, 1991). Commentators on the cultural explanations of inequality of outcomes distinguish two main streams: 1) cultural deficit theory and 2) cultural difference theory (Foley, 1991; Hallinan, 2001; Ogbu, 1987). According to the former, poor educational outcomes of ethnic minority young people are bound up with their value orientations, expressed in the form of a counter school culture or, as Steinberg (2000: 65) puts it, 'cultural deficiencies explain why the poor languish in poverty'. That is, young people brought up in a culture of poverty fail to utilise opportunities, in part, because they accept the social location that those in dominant positions discursively position them as occupying and their acceptance of this further impedes their educational and occupational aspirations (Foley, 1991; Hallinan, 2001). This internalisation operates as a form of social control, which the unsuspecting young person accepts as an individual choice or simply as fate (Lehmann, 1993).

This reading of 'culture' suggests that some aspects of the culture of ethnic minority communities impede their adaptation to the host society, which explains their disadvantaged position. Although this cultural explanation of inequality seems to intersect with structural perspectives, it has other versions which offer alternative explanations. One example is the cultural difference perspective, which challenges the view that ethnic minority cultures are deficient simply because they are different (Foley, 1991: 61). This view suggests that teachers' basic assumptions and their labelling of certain socio-linguistic groups as deficient undermines their learning. In contrast to the pathologising cultural deficiency approach, the cultural differences perspective holds that black students choose not to engage with the education system because they reject the values which schools symbolise (Hallinan, 2001; Foley, 1991). Drawing on Ogbu's work, Foley (1991) claims that this lack of engagement, played out in modes of speech and behavioural patterns, is a form of resistance, a means of rejecting the values of the dominant society and achievement as defined within the dominant discourse.

From the reviewed literature it appears that cultural attributes, such as norms, values, belief systems, attitudes and relations of different groups interact with the prevailing social structures, albeit in ways that are different for different socio-cultural groups.

Undoubtedly, there are strong stereotypical assumptions about young people from ethnic minority groups. However, there is a consistent negative trend for some groups, and a positive one for others, which is closely associated with the ways in which young people engage with the education process. Such differential engagement is explained in culturalist terms (Ogbu, 1987); cast in terms of anti-school culture in the case of black young people, and an alien or distinct (albeit pro-school) culture in the case of those from Asian backgrounds. In this context, the term 'culture' has different meanings for the different groups in different situations. As Campbell and McLean (2002: 24) point out, the Afro-Caribbean community can be described as sharing linguistic and religious commonalities with their white peers to the extent that much of its culture is incorporated into the mainstream British one. Modood states:

For example, in Britain African Caribbeans may be culturally valued in some contexts but not able to convert this into economic advantage, while South Asians may build up economic advantage without being culturally valued. (Modood, 2007: 117-118)

Of particular interest is how black young people's cultural practices of sports, music and fashion have become trendsetters in contemporary youth culture, not only in the UK, but also in the West in general. However, in dominant educational discourses, they are often represented in negative terms as lacking in aspiration (see for example the volume edited by Majors, 2001). These two contrasting views towards black youth are well captured by Davis:

Black boys are loved and loathed at school. They are heroes and standard bearers of hip-hop culture and athleticism in schools, while simultaneously experiencing disproportionate levels of punishment and academic marginality. (Davis, 2001: 169)

It is argued that the everyday life experiences of black youth, in the main, give rise to three responses: counter school culture, conforming behaviour or balancing between peer pressure and academic achievement (Sewell and Majors, 2001; Warikoo, 2011). With counter-school culture, they show resistance to authority, schooling and what this stands for, because they experience the education system as oppressive, consequently actively positioning themselves 'outside' its reach. In the adoption of a conforming behaviour they 'accept both the means and goals of schooling' (Sewell and Majors,

2001: 184) and while balancing peer pressure and academic achievement, they negotiate peer acceptance and schooling demands (Warikoo, 2011). It is often argued that the promises of 'meritocracy' do not work out for all social and 'racial' groups (Hallinan, 2001, Kao, 2000). Yet the contemporary labour market equally remains inaccessible for the unskilled and those without qualifications. That is, non-engagement, counter-school culture, resistance, and low aspirations associated with young people of ethnic minority communities do not hold for all, for some immigrant communities are propelled to engage positively with the opportunities available (Kao and Tienda, 1995). Since educational achievement has a strong bearing on the destiny of these groups, it has attracted renewed interest from educational researchers (Archer and Francis, 2007; Campbell and McLean, 2002; Coffey, 2001; Modood, 2004; Somers, 1994) but it is the diversity in achievement that has attracted most attention. The diversity among different communities and the richness of multicultural society have contributed to an increased focus on concepts of identity and ethnicity in current academic and policy discourses, regarding which Archer and Francis (2007: 29) note that:

Muslim religious identities and 'new' migrants, such as refugees and asylum-seekers are all subject to exclusionary and racialised practices – but do not fit comfortably within previous, more static or binary notions of cultural and biological racism.

In the works of Zhou (2005) and Dwyer et al. (2006), 'ethnicity' is considered as a form of resource. Rooted in the culturalist explanation, 'minority ethnicity' can be used as an analytic device for accounting for the variations in educational aspirations and outcomes among young people from different minority ethnic groups. According to this view, while some minority ethnic groups tend to draw successfully on the instrumental aspects of their minority ethnicity to overcome structural disadvantages, others fail to capitalise on the same micro-level processes (Fukuyama, 1993; Zhou, 1997; Zhou and Bankston, 1994). In this specific reading of social capital, the focus is on the normative cultural attributes of immigrant groups and the role of community networks in enabling the intergenerational social mobility of young people. It is seen as a dormant force available within each social group which, when mobilised, can lead to the amelioration of the socioeconomic conditions of immigrant groups.

Zhou and Bankston (1994), drawing on Coleman's conception of social capital, studied how Vietnamese migrants in New Orleans have adapted to life in the US. Their study focused on identifying cultural aspects specific to their community and sought to examine the extent to which its cultural orientation was instrumental in shaping the way its youngsters engage with educational opportunities. According to the authors, this community has settled well in the US despite their short duration of stay in the US with no pre-existing links, coming to reside in deprived inner-city neighbourhoods when they lacked appropriate educational qualifications. Drawing on their minority ethnic resources, such as language, norms and family ethos, they have succeeded in positively exploiting the available opportunity avenues. One such area of opportunity they have utilised well is education, whereby their children 'outperformed, showed fewer dropout rates and disproportionately attracted more academic awards than their native counterparts' (Zhou and Bankston, 1994: 838). These scholars attribute this success to aspects of the Vietnamese minority culture, which has facilitated an intergenerational closure, i.e. parents knowing the parents of their children's friends, which as such is a form of informal social control that enforces community norms (Bankston and Zhou, 2002: 287). They found that the Vietnamese community instrumentally deploys intergenerational closure to help their young people negotiate integrating into the mainstream American culture, while retaining their distinctive minority culture.

In their study, Zhou and Bankston emphasise the role of cultural attributes. They argue that given that most of the first generation Vietnamese coming to resettle in the US were either farmers or fishers in their home country with low levels of literacy, their human and financial capital was limited. What is so characteristic about this community is 'the high level of normative integration of families' (1994: 830). Their strong inter-family links and strong inter-personal relations have equipped older members of this community to provide an effective supervising role to their young people. With the firm belief that education is a main vehicle for social mobility, the Vietnamese community has fostered the idea of collective and constructive engagement with the schooling process. By mobilising aspects of their culture, for example, obedience and behavioural conformity, this community has succeeded in setting 'community goals and behaviour standards' to assist their offspring in achieving upward social mobility – a process sanctioned by strong community links, bounded solidarity, enforceable trust and having

identifiable collective and shared goals (1994: 831). Thus Zhou and Bankston (1994: 825) note that:

... the extent to which immigrant cultures are disadvantaged or advantaged can be dissected in terms of whether these original cultures frustrate or facilitate upward mobility on the part of the second generation.

These authors acknowledge that their use of the concept of social capital is based on the Durkheimian view that successful intergenerational transition can be fully explained by the dense integration of minority ethnic young people within their community networks. Like the structural and culturalist views discussed earlier, this perspective on social capital underplays the role of the critical agent. It raises the concern that minority ethnic groups lacking the kinds of cultural attributes found in the Vietnamese case are more likely to experience downward assimilation. Indeed, citing an earlier study by Portes and Stepick (1993), Zhou and Bankston (1994: 824) give the example of the Haitian community in the US whose dreams for upward social mobility were 'shattered by the rapid assimilation of their offspring into the sub-culture of the impoverished black inner city'.

In a similar vein, Lauglo (2000) has found that immigrant young people in Norway often excel in education, sometimes even performing better than their native counterparts. Central to the argument is that these communities often lack access to networks that would help them climb the employment ladder. To compensate for the weak ties with people in influential positions in the employment market they take advantage of educational opportunities to the fullest, for this offers them the only realistic gateway to employment. In addition, refugees often possess 'strong agency' (2000: 167), but this is not always the case. Commenting on the Haitian community, Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993: 1336-37) explain how resource-poor immigrant communities risk losing their children to the dominant impoverished local communities, because they fail to reinforce their moral values or socialise their children in their minority ethnic norms. The studies covered indicate that the integration process of second-generation immigrant young people is bound up with the effectiveness of their relationships with the older members of their community and the nature of social links with it.

Niekerk (2000) describes similar processes, although she does not necessarily attribute differences in intergenerational social mobility to the possession of social capital. In her comparative study of the social mobility of the Hindustani and Creole Surinamese in the Netherlands, she deploys a culturalist approach. She finds that while both groups share many similarities in terms of country of origin (Surinam) and immigration history, there are, nonetheless, remarkable differences in their intergenerational social mobility. That is, the Hindustani students fare better in accessing educational and employment opportunities than their Creole counterparts. These differences, Niekerk suggests, lie in the specific cultural attributes of the different groups, i.e. value orientations, views relative to education and family structures, which inform family strategies. She posits that Hindustani families' attitude towards education is instrumental in that they use it as a strategy to enhance their social position within the community, whereby 'driven by materialistic incentives', they encourage their children to choose 'high status professions', such as law and medicine. Prestige acquired through educational credentials translates into valued membership of the community. Such status-driven attitudes towards achievement as an instrument for recognition feeds into the community, thereby setting the standards expected from each member. Older members in the family, then, as custodians of the family's social position in the community, are under pressure to ensure that their children capitalise on educational opportunities.

Niekerk suggests that such social pressures and expectations, prevalent within the Hindustani community, are uncommon within the Creole community. She argues that community networks among the families of the latter do not facilitate an intergenerational transmission of expectations and aspirations, at least not to the extent of their Hindustani counterparts. Here, Niekerk seems to suggest that, because group membership is not necessarily acquired through educational credentials, Creole families are under no pressure from other members of their community to invest in their children's education or demand more from them in the same way their Hindustani counterparts are and unlike them, they do not see the benefits of the symbolic capital appropriable through the education system. Rather, being less authoritative and more democratic vis-à-vis their children's school careers, they leave educational and career decision-making to their children. Consequently, Creole students often choose less challenging and even less rewarding subjects and careers in the health and social care sector (Niekerk, 2000: 197). Central to Niekerk's argument is that one cannot explain

differences in the intergenerational social mobility of minority ethnic young people between different groups without considering the role of non-material resources, i.e. networks, cultural values and community relations.

In their study of the role of community links and participation among people of Afro-Caribbean backgrounds in South England, Campbell and McLean (2002) advance similar arguments to Niekerk. They find that while members of this community value interpersonal friendship, they lack the kinds of the internal dynamics that foster community cohesion. They put forward the contention that institutional racism might have led members of this community to hold negative views about local community organisations. Studying the ways in which social identities are constructed, they claim that in the historic context of oppression and marginalisation, excluded groups construct group identities and engage in collective action to challenge oppressive systems. Compared to the Asians who retained their distinct minority ethnic identity, Caribbean 'culture and identity had become 'mainstreamed'' (Campbell and McLean, 2002: 24) in that Afro-Caribbean young people share many similarities with their white peers, including: music, sports and the lifestyle trends influenced by popular culture. In certain respects, with their subculture emanating from fashion, celebrities, sports and music industry, black youth are trendsetters, which is 'a domain where Asian parents have no regard for and [they] even try to limit their children's exposure to it' (Modood, 2004: 102).

This 'mainstreaming', though, according to Campbell and McLean, has unexpectedly weakened group solidarity among this community, at least in comparison with some of the Asian communities. Campbell and McLean conclude that the collective identity of the Afro-Caribbean community is characterised by a partial process of integration into British mainstream society that has not been translated into social, economic and political integration (p. 27). Although these authors do not comment on the institutional barriers young black men face, the implication of their stance is that minority ethnic groups can affect their social mobility by drawing on their distinctive ethnicity. More importantly, the theme of 'race' relations in its historical sense of domination, exploitation and subjugation appears to be absent from their analysis. Following Morrow (1999: 760), I suggest that without proper contextualisation, an uncritical use of culturalist frameworks could easily take the form of 'deficit theory'. Indeed, as Vincent et al. (2012) argue, even well-resourced black middle class families remain

‘watchful’ for their children, because their accumulated cultural capital does not necessarily guarantee an automatic escape from racial prejudice that their children experience with the schooling system. Consequently, the intersectionality of ‘race’ and class is more complex than the acquisition of cultural capital may imply (Vincent, et al., 2012). It is, therefore, necessary to take account of how historical domination and prejudice permeate social institutions. I also suggest that over-reliance on culturalist explanations is problematic, because of their essentialising assumptions about cultures and emphasis on the collective biographies of these communities rather than on individual ones. And finally, I suggest that the illusion of meritocracy brought about by the expansion of educational opportunities underplays the reality that even though schooling may offer opportunities for social mobility, it also reproduces much of the racial inequalities that certain communities continue to experience (Crozier, 2005; Gillborn, 2008; Vincent et al., 2012).

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined four theoretical perspectives on the processes underlying educational and career aspirations. It has shown that the development of a career identity is a process that is often messy, intricate and daunting for most young people. A number of factors at different levels mediate this process. It has been argued that aspiration is marked by key milestones which are developmental in nature. That is, to begin with young people often make decisions within their limited horizon for action, and because career choices are often consequential, early life choices have implications for future ones. The literature suggests that the construction of career identities is to an important extent shaped in parallel through social processes. Clearly, while it is possible for some to achieve their life goals, for the majority of them it appears that their fate is bound up with their social position.

Finally, this chapter has discussed some of current theoretical conceptualisations of how young people from minority ethnic communities engage with educational and employment opportunities. It has been argued that differential outcomes within ‘racially’ defined groups pose awkward questions about the essentialising discourses that focus on macro-level factors. Much of the discussion has revolved around how the intergenerational social mobility of immigrant young people is connected to their social

embeddedness. With the central concern of this study being how the interplay of structure, culture and subjectivities impacts on educational and employment outcomes and hence, the ensuing life-chances of minority ethnic young people, this chapter has also considered the idea of social capital, often used in the literature both as a descriptive and as an analytic concept. This concept is premised on the idea that social relations among members of a given community at the micro-level interact with structural factors to influence the social mobility of individuals and communities (Edwards and Foley, 1999). However, it has emerged from the discussion that it is unsustainable to suggest that all forms of intergenerational social mobility are reducible to the nature and quality of social relationships. For, despite the fact that early experiences and social processes may shape people's life chances, there always remains scope for human agency. In sum, young people have to grapple with a constant struggle to break away from structural and contextual constraints as well as the normative expectations of their community cultural practices.

Chapter 3: Developing a Research Approach: Methodology and methods

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to set out the methodological framework for this research and to present and justify the methods that have been used. I begin the chapter with a discussion of problems pertaining to researching young people in more general terms. I then discuss some key epistemological, ontological and methodological considerations and how the explorative nature of this research on young people from diaspora communities has led me to choose an interpretive research design. The chapter gives an outline of the research design, including an account of the process of negotiating entry and recruiting research participants and justifications for sampling, the data collection methods adopted and how the analysis has been carried out. In the final section, I give a reflective account of my position as a researcher.

3.2 Researching young people

Researching young people is a complicated venture (Ball et al., 2000; Taylor, 2005) and one of the challenges of interviewing young people is to maintain their interest throughout the interview. According to Ball et al. (2000: 19), ‘one can only get glimpses of their complex lives’, because they ‘select, revise and re-order their experiences during the interview’. I argue that conceptualising young people’s formation of choices is a process that reflects a complex interplay of individual, family and community processes on the one hand, and macro-structural influences on the other. Further, researching young people is complicated because the very term ‘youth’ is inextricably bound up with normative assumptions and social expectations. Researching the complex interactions between individual, structural, contextual/cultural and developmental factors pertaining to young people’s choice biographies requires an approach that takes into account the changes that they go through and the multi-dimensional factors surrounding their choices. Of course, there is no single way of researching how young people plan their lives. Ball et al. (2000) argue that young people’s participation in the post-16 education market can best be studied within the framework of the dual perspective of rational action theory as understood in the Weberian tradition of social analysis and the influences of dynamic social structures. Ball et al.’s approach is constructed around individual-society interaction, and I share with them the position that young people’s calculative *actions* are ‘patterned by

socialised frames of perception and thought' (Ball et al., 2000: 22). Building on this ontological stance, I posit that young people's educational *outcomes* are similarly patterned by the structuring impact of contextual factors. I also contend that the nexus of agency-structure-culture, as is found in the highly charged area of the choices of young people of immigrant backgrounds, calls for an interpretive research design. That is, due to the nature of the study I have chosen to use an interpretive research paradigm, which I understand as being a design that elicits people's felt needs, personal perceptions and views on events pertaining to their lives. The interpretive approach can be traced back to 'the German *verstehen* tradition in sociology' (Schwandt, 1998: 221).

3.3 Interpretive research paradigm

My choice of methodological framework is based on two grounds. First, it is related to the nature of the substantive themes of my research, young people's construction of choice biographies within the context of their community relations and dominant opportunity structures. As I maintain throughout this thesis, these themes are entwined with individual biographies, family/community dynamics and macro-structural processes. Second, it appears from the existing literature that not much is known about Somali young people or about the intergenerational social mobility of this group and hence, in response to this starting position, this research is explorative in nature. In situations where not much is known about the phenomenon under study, a qualitative approach is preferred over the quantitative research paradigm (Marshall and Rossman, 2011), because it offers flexibility in design conducive to meeting the explorative objective as well as an opportunity for reflexivity during the emerging research process.

To respond to both the complexity of researching young people from an immigrant community background and the paucity of empirical research on Somali young people's choices, I have chosen a qualitative/interpretive research design, which focuses on eliciting subjective narratives and personal perceptions on processes that shape people's lives. Within this tradition, research concerns itself, in the main, with generating profound understanding of people's definitions of their situation (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Goffman, 1959; Schwandt, 1998). My development of a research strategy is based on the view that, depending on their social position, people tend to define matters of social concern differently (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984). Unlike the positivist paradigm, where truth and knowledge production are independent of the

researcher, in the qualitative/interpretive approach such objectivity is contested. With the latter perspective, it is held that researching processes underlying people's experiences is bound up with the researcher/researched interaction. This stance has generated much heated and uneasy debate in the field of social inquiry, for it has been charged with being identical to a relativism that calls into question the truth-value of all knowledge claims, including its own. Its staying power, however, stems from the view that social norms, perceptions, typifications, representations and 'definitions of the situation' condition human behaviour, to the extent that we can with some certainty make some generalisations about social actions (Ryan, 1970; Goffman, 1959; Berger and Luckmann, 1967). The strength of this research design is its focus on explaining and understanding how people make sense of the multifaceted influences on their lives, that is, how they subjectively internalise objective realities (Schutz, 1967; Bourdieu, 1977).

Conducting research presupposes a commitment to a particular view of what counts as knowledge and as evidence to validate that knowledge. It also involves a particular way of going about how to find out about what is being researched. That is, it is suggested that research is often not independent of the researcher nor of the theoretical conceptualisation adopted in pursuit of what is worth knowing. There is always some degree of subjective involvement with the research topic. A similar ontological and epistemological view underpins the way this research is designed. One important assumption underlying research on and with young people is the general consensus across empirical research of the existence of differential outcomes of young people's transitions for different socio-cultural groups (Vermeulen and Perlmann, 2000). An additional ontological assumption pertains to the existence of a group dimension to the intergenerational social mobility of the Somali community. Here, much of the initial thinking about this study was based on the assumption that the diaspora Somali community share a particular 'common stock of knowledge' (Berger and Luckmann, 1967) including a shared history of immigration and the impact of the continuing political instability in the country of origin, both of which affect members of this community, although perhaps not to the same degree. Ontological assumptions about the nature of Somali young people's transitions are premised on these two features, carried over from the country of origin, along with the contextual influences they are

exposed to in the UK that inform young people's perceptions of opportunities in the here-and-now.

One major problem with the interpretive paradigm is the risk of accepting the actor's subjective narratives at face value as they relate their lived experiences. This stance might lead to the inevitable conclusion that social reality, i.e. differential educational outcomes or social mobility are all relative to the individual actor. Regarding this conclusion, the literature on social research methodology is fraught with tension over ontological concerns and epistemological questions. This tension is about the production of knowledge to understand and explain situations of social interest (Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Usher, 1996). Carr and Kemmis, for instance, discuss some of the major flaws of the interpretive tradition's epistemological approaches to the production of knowledge. By drawing on the work of Habermas's critical approach, they note that reducing the business of empirical social research to the sole purpose of describing the subjective meanings of individuals is rather problematic, because 'subjective meanings are bound up with an objective context that both conditions, i.e. limits both the horizon of the individual's intentions and the likelihood of their realisation' (Carr and Kemmis, 1986: 135). They continue by claiming that the subjective stance, much celebrated in the interpretive/phenomenological approaches to the study of human conduct, is not necessarily that 'subjective', but rather, to some extent, is an internalisation of objective realities, which often unfortunately leads to 'distorted self-understanding' (137). Following Habermas, they suggest that critical social research should embody an epistemology that moves beyond the interpretive concern with uncritical description of people's accounts of self-understanding. These views resonate with Hammersley and Atkinson's advice that qualitative researchers should be aware of the pitfalls of taking people's accounts either at face value, or discarding them as irrelevant without giving them due consideration (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 120)

Researching young people, then, is inevitably bound up with values and positions that emanate from the way in which society is organised and their position in a society that emphasises education. Young people are expected to be educated and progress to work; they are supposed to require guidance around planning their futures, and simultaneously are expected to develop the necessary competencies to be able to deal effectively with the adult world of work. While still at school they are expected, and perhaps even required, to make up their minds regarding their futures as well as to reach certain

socially constructed milestones. These normative expectations reflect societal views towards young people, which, as Jones and Wallace (1992) argue, have been subject to changes. Similar presuppositions underlie expectations around the concept of 'intergenerational social mobility' implicated in the study of children of immigrant backgrounds. Here, the common view is that Somali young people, for instance, should be doing better than their parents' generation socially, economically and educationally. However, making choices and the ways in which the young engage with the world is partly bound up with 'the fluidity, change and instability of their life courses and the process of growing up' (Ball et al., 2000: 17). For not engaging with education as an instrument to further one's career aims at school leaving age is consequential.

Such normative aspects of researching young people are in part linked to the very nature of the aims of education: 'it is good to be educated' (Flew, 1976). Social research, then, could be value-bound and ideologically driven. As Janesick (2003) notes, qualitative researchers should find out possible biases underlying their study and critically reflect on them. By reflective engagement with the research process, the researcher will then be in a stronger position to 'challenge prevailing myths including the myth of objectivity' (p. 56). In a similar vein, Kvale (1996) notes that 'scientific knowledge is intrinsically related to human values and interests' (p. 120). I recognise that many of the key notions in this research including young people's transition, intergenerational mobility are normative. Being aware of the legitimate value concerns thus raised, a critical stance is taken to question value assumptions underlying these key themes.

Taking these processes into account, I have therefore adopted a research strategy with two central features: an interpretive as well as critical understanding of community relations to question uncritical assumptions about 'immigrant' communities. Researching the multi-dimensional complexity of the transitions of young people from ethnic minority communities involves a critical approach to deconstruct how the power dynamics embodied in access to opportunities and institutional authorities define their life-chances. This led me to adopt a critical stance towards how social forces shape the views people have of themselves and of others. Such a commitment to unravelling structural and micro-level processes at once necessitates the triangulation of different research approaches, albeit within the wider qualitative research paradigm. Therefore, I have also adopted a critical stance towards the research because of my position as a

researcher in the researched community. I come back to this matter in the final section of the chapter.

In the following I explain why I chose the interpretive approach. Young people's construction of choice biographies seems to be a personal matter, which is the standard view based on rational choice theory and to a large extent it is a personal matter. However, in the interpretive approach the personal dimension has limitations. For example, in the case of young people's construction of choice biographies, it is argued that choices are shaped by social and contextual/structural processes, which young people, as reflective agents, internalise and personalise to make sense of their successes and failures. The personal dimension is, therefore, not necessarily a true reflection of what is possible, but merely a subjective interpretation by the individual respondent. Clearly, this personal dimension of young people's engagement with opportunities is patterned by a complex interaction of various factors operating at different levels. Moreover, young people's transition is inextricably bound up with how they construct and express their identities. It follows, then, that researching this complex web of interactions requires an approach that takes into account the changing positions of the individual young person who, while consciously seeking to pursue their individual interest, also responds to contextual and structural influences. Research in this context should make explicit the processes underlying the subjective understanding of opportunities by the young people, while accepting that this understanding is not necessarily personal in origin. Therefore, the design of the current research study makes allowance for the dialectical relationship that underpins young people's construction of learner and career identities. That is, it is rigorous enough to capture respondents' subjectivities and critical enough to question the taken-for-granted explanations inherent in normative research on young people. One particular methodological approach for illuminating the subjective feelings and meanings people give to their social actions is that offered by the social constructivist approach (Charmaz, 2006).

In the social constructivist perspective, understanding and explaining successes and failures of diaspora young people involves studying how this particular group interacts with prevailing opportunity structures and thereby makes sense of or gives meaning to self-identity and self-image (Burr, 2003). The focus is on the way in which the subjects construct their identities in their new homelands. Rejecting the essentialist and deterministic tendencies of both structuralist and culturalist approaches, whereby

people's choices are represented as mere products of social forces, social constructivism deconstructs how agents engage with social processes (Burr, 2003). In particular, in relation to the current research the focus is on the way language and the 'othering' discourses that are deployed as well as the ways in which young people of ethnic minority backgrounds are talked or written about. As such, this method of analysis eschews the framing of poor educational outcomes in terms of a deficiency discourse. According to Charmaz (2006: 130), the constructivist approach, an essential part of the interpretive research tradition, acknowledges that both data collection and analysis are co-constructed by the researcher and the researched.

Charmaz (2005: 507) argues that the 'constructivist approach emphasises the studied phenomenon rather than the methods of studying it and its advocates take a reflexive stance on modes of knowing and representing studied life'. This means giving close attention to empirical realities and our collected renderings of them as well as locating oneself amongst them (Foley, 2002). By focussing on the key themes of this study, i.e. the construction of identity, intergenerational mobility, career and educational choice-making, the selected approach is geared towards exploring the views of young people and community leaders on these processes. As stated earlier, the central focus of this study is to explore how Somali young people engage with education and employment opportunities, while constructing their identities, both as young people and as members of a diaspora community. Given this aim, the research questions are concerned with how Somali young people construct their identities, view their situations, relate their experiences to social and contextual processes, position themselves in the wider social and cultural context, i.e. career and social identity, and under what conditions they do so. This emphasis on the 'how' and 'what' rather than on the 'why' questions calls for an approach and a research design which offers the possibility of eliciting people's feelings, perceptions and perspectives (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003: 215; 2005: 498; Charmaz, 2006; 2005).

In pursuing this further, I considered the extent to which the historical and pre-migration narratives of the first generation of the Somali community have shaped the process of 'identity' formation among the diaspora-born/raised. In seeking to address this issue, I have attended to the personal narratives, experiences, social relationships and self-positioning of the participants in the wider multicultural society in the UK. In short, addressing this matter inevitably calls for an approach that captures the lived

world of the respondents. It is in light of this concern with the way in which young people construct their selfhood that I decided to employ a constructivist grounded approach. In fact, the constructivist approach is particularly suitable when the focus is on investigating experiences and subjective meanings. The way social constructivism is taken up here is, then, twofold. First, it is a response to the '*othering*' connotations common in many of the current discourses on ethnic minority young people. This *othering* is often cast in terms of 'underachieving' and thus, ethnic minority young people are constructed as non-engaging and/or lacking in the appropriate dispositions required for constructive engagement with the schooling process. The constructivist approach problematises such notions as 'underachievement' as they are discursively constructed by policymakers and those in power positions. Second, although it does not dispute the existence of social disparity, and recognises that social inequality is not a social construction (Crotty, 1998), it does dispute meanings imposed on those experiencing social inequalities. By placing these experiences against the backdrop of the interpretive tradition of social research under the social constructivist lens the aim is to give the accounts of the '*othered*'.

3.4 Negotiating entry, sampling and recruiting research participants

After securing formal approval from King's College London (see Appendix A), I started to negotiate initial access with key informants from community organisations from five London boroughs. Gaining access involves 'the granting or withholding of permission for the research to be conducted' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Like sampling, this was conducted in a careful manner. Good interpersonal skills, persistence and tact are needed once access is gained in order to get the most out of the interviews (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). All the selected community organisations were involved in projects related to young people, which was one of the main criteria for selecting them and another selection criterion was the location. As I was focussing on Somali young people in London, I chose organisations in the city. However, so as to have variety in the data, I selected organisations based on their locality and on the relevance of their engagement with projects involving young people and the number of years they had been in operation. That is, I selected organisations that had been operating for at least five years.

In addition to serving as interviewees and key informants, representatives of community organisations assisted me with accessing potential respondents and subsequent sampling was undertaken through snowballing. That is, those selected and interviewed during the initial stage of the data collection were asked to recommend other potential research participants. While sampling through snowballing is most suitable for choosing candidates fit for the purpose at hand, there is, however, the risk of having respondents sharing too many similarities. Consequently, there were two main problems relating to such a sampling strategy: the risk of reducing the richness of the collected data and the risk of sampling bias, which would have had major implications for the reliability and generalisability of the research findings. To address this problem, recommendations for snowballing from those already interviewed and those from the gatekeepers were critically evaluated. This was aimed at obtaining maximum variability within the sample, that is, I included in the sample participants from diverse backgrounds so that the inevitable impact of unquestioned assumptions and biases held either by the research participants or the researcher were minimised. In particular, I sought to include cases of young people who were not engaging in any form of education, employment or training. Whereas I initially wanted to study young people up to the age of twenty-one only, I later decided to extend the age range up to twenty-five. In so doing, as LeCompte and Preissle (1993: 75) argue, ‘comparisons against the norm may be made and salient dimensions of more moderate cases may be explained’.

As part of negotiating entry, I sought informed consent (see Appendix B). According to the principle of informed consent, research participation should be voluntary and based only on full information to being provided (de Vaus, 2001). De Vaus discusses eight key areas which consenting research participants should be informed about. Following De Vaus, I explained the research purpose, introduced myself as well as describing the processes of data collection and processing, how I selected participants, their role in the process and assured them that their participation was entirely on a voluntary basis and did not involve any risk to themselves. In line with the above, I drafted two information sheets (see Appendix C), one addressed to young people and the other addressed to representatives of community organisations. I shared these information sheets with potential research participants. In addition to these key areas, I reassured research participants that after initial agreement they would still retain the right to withdraw without having to explain or justify their reasons for doing so and that their withdrawal

would not disadvantage them in any way. I also made it clear that they would still be able to withdraw from the study even after their participation and up to the date when the writing-up would start in March 2011. Furthermore, I sought permission to tape-record the interviews and reassured the volunteers of strict confidentiality regarding their participation and the information they would provide. Finally, I gave them contact details of my supervisor for any queries or concerns. In addition to the written information, those who had agreed to participate in the research were given a verbal explanation to reiterate the above before the start of the interview. Only those consenting to participate after they had been sufficiently informed about the research were then interviewed. See Appendix D for a reflective journal on recruiting young people as research participants.

Unlike pursuing statistical representativeness in quantitative research, where the researcher follows replicable procedures, sampling for qualitative studies is based on the relevance of the sample for the topic of the study (Patton, 1990). Often termed 'purposeful sampling', it follows completely different criteria from those of a typical quantitative study. A core aim of purposeful sampling is to select information-rich cases study of which would meet the research objectives, i.e. address the questions under investigation (Patton, 1990: 169). Through personal knowledge and informal networks, I initially negotiated entry to four community organisations and sampled two others through snowballing, while I approached two more organisations via an internet search.

I collected data from thirty young people aged between fourteen and twenty-five years. In 2009, I collected information from ten young people at GCSE level and subsequently from a further twenty at college and university age in 2010 and 2011. Of the thirty young people twelve were female and eighteen male, of whom ten were born in the UK, five in the Netherlands, one in Norway, one in Kenya, one in Saudi Arabia and twelve in Somalia. Of the twelve Somalia-born participants, two lived in the UK, one since age six, and the other in the Netherlands since age three, one grew up in Saudi Arabia, one in Germany, and only five had lived in Somalia into their late teens. Apart from the ten UK-born participants, the rest had experienced multiple moves before settling in the UK (see Appendix E for a profile of the young people research participants). This profile of the research participants had some implications for my research, for I initially aimed to study second-generation young people, but only ten out of the thirty in my sample met this criterion. Another five participants were secondary migrants, in the sense that they

had relocated from the Netherlands and Norway where they could have been identified as second generation. Furthermore, five more participants had spent their formative years either in the UK or elsewhere outside their country of origin. Therefore, the vast majority of the young people interviewed were the children of immigrant parents not only in the UK, but the diaspora-born/raised of an exiled community. This then led me to adopt the phrase ‘diaspora young people’, which captures not only the diaspora-born young people, but also those raised in the diaspora. In addition, the term ‘diaspora’ captures very well how the young people felt about their identity and geographical belonging (cf. Chapter 5). This diversification of the sample has enriched the quality and breadth of the data.

In addition, I collected data from thirteen key informants from ten different community organisations located in two outer and three inner London boroughs in 2010 and 2011. I had prior connections in my capacity as chairman of one of the organisations, while I was also connected to a second organisation in having facilitated a workshop on Somali youth. However, in neither of these organisations did my familiarity with the research participants affect my data collection as I reflected critically on my position as a researcher. I came into contact with two of the organisations through an internet search and through informal links I was introduced to the fifth and the subsequent sampling was done through snowballing.

3.5 Method of data collection

The data were collected by means of interviewing, specifically semi-structured interviewing, because of the nature of the central concern of this study: namely, to elicit the ways in which young people construct their choices and engage with opportunities as well as how they negotiate between competing cultural and structural influences that have some bearing on their lives. Interviewing in qualitative research is an effective tool in cases where the focus is on getting insight into people’s perceptions, experiences and how they make sense of social processes (Taylor and Bodgan, 1984; Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). Interviewing is a generic term, for there are several ways of carrying this out and for the purpose of this study, I drew on the principles of ethnographic interviewing (Briggs, 1986; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Spradley, 1979). According to Hammersley and Atkinson (2007: 110), ‘a crucial aim of ethnographic interviewing is to facilitate a conversation, thereby giving the

respondent much leeway to give their personal account without much interference from the interviewer'. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007: 117) suggest that interviewing in the qualitative research design is comparable to any other social interaction and as such, is always structured. In light of this, they note that the notion of 'unstructured' should be treated with caution. The best way to capture complex issues is through in-depth interviewing, and since it was respondents' narratives that I was interested in, I chose the semi-structured interview format, because with this approach the dynamics of the interview process cannot be fully pre-determined and established in advance. With this in mind, I started to gather data not with a set of sequenced questions, but rather with a list of topics to be covered through a few main interview questions reflecting the central concern of the study, which were drafted in such a way as to trigger respondents into talking about issues of interest to the research (Rubin and Rubin, 2005: 135). The drafted interview questions were further fine-tuned and checked for clarity and fitness-for-purpose by first piloting them with volunteer respondents. See Appendix F for an example of the list of questions that I used as an interview guide.

Based on this ethnographic approach, data for this study were collected through semi-structured individual and group interviews with the sample of thirty young people and thirteen community leaders. The data covered immigration and personal narratives. The collected data included respondents' accounts of their evolving understanding, perceptions, experiences and identity accounts. I also asked them about their ambitions, frustrations and critical incidents that defined their lives. Since the data collection involved semi-structured interviews, the drafted interview questions were mainly used as guidance to ensure that relevant data were collected. I found Hammersley and Atkinson's (2007) typology of interviews quite useful in which they distinguish two types of interview questions: directive and non-directive. Non-directive questioning is meant to prompt the respondent into talking about a particular broader field. However, the flow of the interviews is equally informed by the dynamics of the discussions and emerging themes, which requires an active engagement with the interviewing process. Interviewing is not a passive process, whereby the researcher merely gathers data, but on the contrary, is an interactive process in which the researcher and the researched interact and/or co-construct meanings (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995; Kvale, 1996: 183). Elsewhere Hammersley and Atkinson (2007: 117) note that 'unlike conversation, ethnographic interviewing involves some degree of control – a control which is subject

to the research agenda'. That is to say, there is no free-floating data collection as some suggest, for interviewing, regardless of the research paradigm, needs to be conducted in a rigorous manner.

However, the emerging meaning-making achieved through active listening need not be taken too far, for to suggest that meanings are merely constructions of reflective interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee entails the risk of underestimating the latter's role in the data collection. I agree with Holstein and Gubrium's (1995) view that the type of the respondents' accounts and researcher's questions result from the respective roles they take, but I also think that reducing collected data to a mere respondent/researcher interaction is problematic. Regarding my approach, I treated the researched as the expert, while I adopted a learner's role and by so doing I was not necessarily interacting with the respondents on equal terms. This is in accordance with the constructivist approach to collecting data, whereby it is a dialectical hermeneutic process involving both the researched as well the researcher. Another characteristic that the constructivist approach shares with other approaches within the interpretive paradigm is that the data are not 'out there' in the field up for grabs, but are created, resulting in descriptions, views and perspectives which best fit the purpose at hand (Ackroyd and Hughes, 1981; Guba, 1990). As Hammersely (2010: 554) puts it, such a view towards data is based on pure 'naive foundationalist epistemology'. Consequently, I approached my respondents as purposive actors who were socially conscious and who were, accordingly, inter-subjectively engaged in a web of social networks. That is, young people are purposive actors because they engage meaningfully with opportunity structures and are socially conscious because their perceptions of the opportunities available are coloured by their lived experiences, individually as much as collectively. So for example, in the former case, I asked the young people to comment on how they go about the choice-making process based on their individual dispositions; and in the latter, their views on the role of significant others in their choices.

Interviewing young people is not an easy task and one of the most difficult aspects of getting information from them is to ensure their engagement with the interview process. I initially found it rather difficult to get them to elaborate on their responses, which was reflected in the transcripts where it appeared that my questions and elaboration of these contained more text than their responses. However, as the interviews progressed, I

managed to minimise my talk and instead relied on nonverbal communication, or what Bernard and Ryan (2010: 31) call ‘the silent probe’, which included nodding and making positive noises to encourage them to elaborate on their responses. Moreover, ethical considerations were consistently taken into account in terms of the duration of the interviews and the way I conducted them (which were more conversational than formal) as well as the content of the questions. I interviewed the respondents in their natural settings, i.e. in their homes, community centres and cafés. For some female respondents, due to their observance of interpretations of Islamic teaching, a condition for their participation in the research was to interview them in their homes and in the presence of another family member, which was the case for three pairs of respondents. I held my interviews in settings convenient to the respondents. Furthermore, using interviewing techniques also involved managing the positional differences between the researcher and the researched. According to Kvale and Brinkman (2009: 33-34) interviewing in a qualitative study involves ‘power asymmetry between the researcher and the researched’, and because of this power asymmetry there is always the risk of the researched expressing what the researcher wants to hear. Kvale and Brinkman suggest that this problematic requires critical reflection on the ‘role of power in the production of interview knowledge’ (p. 34).

3.6 Data analysis

It needs to be mentioned that, to a certain extent, the formulation of the research questions as well as the general research design was influenced by the theoretical perspective adopted. However, this only provided a general framework for guiding my thinking and hence, this did not interfere with the emergence of the themes. As Glaser and Strauss (1967: 46) argue, conviction about a particular theoretical perspective can potentially be ‘doctrinaire’ in that it delimits the emerging perspectives. Consequently, in my attempt to unpack processes underlying young people’s choice biographies within the context of their community and contemporary youth subcultures, I adopted a grounded theory approach and kept the study open (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). That is, the themes emerging from the individual interviews were first compared between the individual accounts to identify any specific patterns of the ways in which Somali young people go about planning their lives. The major themes emerging from their accounts were compared to those of the key informants. The aim here was to compare the experiences, perceptions and views of the two groups of

respondents. Subsequently, I drew together findings and insights gained from the analysis of the two sets of data (young people and community organisation participants) and carried out further analyses in the context of the tentative theoretical model developed earlier and in the context of available empirical research. However, despite the fact that grounded theory advocates that researchers should not be carrying out data collection from an established philosophical or theoretical perspective, it is never possible to adopt a *tabula rasa* approach to data collection, that is, it is never devoid of theoretical perspectives (Usher, 1996). Hence, the theoretical conceptualisations of the reproduction thesis, social capital perspectives and discourses related to the role of subjectivities in the construction of choice biographies discussed in Chapter 2 all have a bearing on the data analysis.

The process of analysing data involved a continuous synthesising of ideas and identifying patterns in the data, both while collecting as well as while analysing the transcripts. In addition, it involved a rigorous reading and understanding of the data before generating categories across the different individual accounts, but also within each individual account. It is also important to note that ‘concepts should earn their way into the research rather than be imposed on it’ (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 292). Getting the gist of the interviews requires multiple listening, not only for what is verbally expressed, but also for nuances, stresses and meanings expressed non-verbally. This microanalysis of data (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 57) involves listening closely to ‘the respondents’ accounts and how they narrate their experiences’ (p. 65). I found that multiple listening offered a better picture of what was being said as well as what was not stated but implied in the different forms of discourse, such as via silences, pauses and laughs too. Moreover, as Hammersley and Atkinson (2007: 162) note, this helps the researcher become familiar with their data. As Silverman (2001: 163) points out, even a pause that is longer than anticipated, or replying in silence are parts of the intricacies of the respondents’ ways of engaging with the topic at hand.

This approach to analysing from the outset has the advantage of capturing emerging ideas that are more grounded in the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) than based on previous knowledge from the existing literature. It has also a second advantage: it helps the researcher familiarise himself or herself with the immense quantity of data generated through the fieldwork, thereby reducing the risk of collecting unnecessary

data that exceeds research objectives (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 12). I kept a record of unfolding insights and emerging themes through memo writing, which is a crucial step in data analysis and in generating grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). In the memos, I produced descriptive narrative accounts of the respondents and the themes from the individual interviews and reduced these to a few key theoretical concepts which, taken together, generated a more abstract set of theoretical themes. This form of analysing individual cases made it possible to compare across cases. This strategy also helped with modifying, redrafting and fine-tuning the data collection. The guiding principle of data analysis was to tease out mundane processes underlying the respondents' views.

Hence, like the development of a methodological stance, choosing a strategy for data analysis needs to be determined in light of competing alternatives (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009) and in order to choose between the available options, I used my research aims as the principal guide. In the case of this study, the aim was to map out processes underlying the way young people go about making choices within the context of their ethnic minority community relations, with data collected through in-depth and semi-structured qualitative interviews covering personal experiences, immigration narratives, perceptions, identities and ambitions. Secondly, my choice of data analysis techniques was informed by the material available for analysis: textual data. In line with the nature of the available material, the strategy for analysing the collected data mainly drew on the principles of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss and Corbin, 1998) and thematic analysis (Agar, 1979; Braun and Clarck, 2006; Ely, Ruth, Downing and Anzul, 1997). At the centre of the grounded approach is the analytical process called 'coding', which involves a way of reducing and conceptualising data to develop concepts that serve as the building blocks of theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Thematic analysis is a way of finding patterns in the data and dissecting central ideas within them. I used thematic analysis and coding of the grounded theory approach in a complementary way, for the key steps in the latter, such as coding, categorising and conceptualising, are similarly used in the former (Ayres, 2008; Braun and Clarck, 2006).

Many of my initial theoretical conceptualisations about the research have changed. This is reflected in the literature review, which I wrote after the data analysis and which I redrafted to help situate the themes emerging from the research better. By way of explanation, right from the start of this research journey (Mackenzie and Ling, 2009), I

have been grappling with identifying theoretical frameworks that could highlight the processes underlying youth transition. I have always been fascinated by how *diasporic* Somali communities in Europe and North America have been fitting in and faring in their adopted homelands. My interest was initially limited to community level processes and consequently, I initially looked to social capital theory. However, later I came to the understanding that social capital, as a theoretical framework for analysing how social actors negotiate micro-macro duality, is but one guide, albeit an important one. Throughout the ‘research journey’, which involved reflection and critical discussion with my supervisors, I have come to realise the limitations of a commitment to just one theoretical perspective. Hence, I have adopted a more open and evolving grounded theory approach. Moreover, it has appeared that other theoretical perspectives could have a bearing on explaining the formation of young people’s choice biographies. These include Bourdieu’s *habitus*, which can be deployed as a framework for understanding how social actions are negotiated by straddling objective structures and subjective experiences (Sewell, 1992). Other processes that underpin the formation of aspirations include the developmental dimensions, i.e. the role of age and the role of human agency. This change in my original thoughts is now reflected in the literature review.

However, I have remained cautious about the ambitious connotations of grounded theory and instead, I have drawn on ethnographic principles where the focus is on thick description (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007) with the aim of ‘eliciting meanings’ (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993: 25). That is, this research seeks to elicit ‘explanatory relationships’ (Stake, 1995: 39) and identify patterns in the messy and complex processes of human interaction. While the more critical ethnographic technique offers a possibility for an extensive descriptive and interpretive effort to explain complexities (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007), the grounded approach focuses on the generation of theoretical insights grounded inductively in the data. Description, according to Hammersley (1998), is a form of an argument in ethnographic studies, but it is not sufficient in itself and it should be used as means for explanations, generalisations and theorizing (p. 47). Although interpretive studies are often limited to description and explanation (p. 53), ‘generalisations or theoretical claims’ are also not uncommon in ethnographic studies (p. 35). Some critics suggest, however, that descriptions are often selective in that they are used to highlight particular features that serve particular aims (p. 47). Hammersley (1992) defends the descriptive character of ethnographic studies,

arguing that the sceptic's dismissal of descriptive research amounts to claiming that history has nothing to tell us. Ball et al. (2000: 17) in their study of young people's post-16 career decisions write that in their data analysis and presentation they deploy the 'language of description' to capture the dynamic nature of their subjects' life experiences. In the following, I continue to present a discussion of the procedures I followed for analysing my data.

I began the data analysis by first transcribing the interviews verbatim, although in a few cases I slightly edited them for grammar where necessary, placing the edited text between square brackets. After the first couple of transcriptions, I found the task of transcribing so laborious that I resorted to the Dragon Naturally Speaking (DNS) software, which is not transcribing software, but a speech recognition tool. Using it was not straightforward, because while listening to the interview audiotapes with headphones, I had to dictate into the microphone. Because of some inaccuracies, some typing and correction were needed afterwards, but I found it functional. I then coded the transcripts based on the grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). See Appendix G for an example of a coded interview. As part of the coding process, I listened to the interviews repeatedly until I became familiar with them and noted down insights and themes as they emerged.

The initial coding and was limited to a mere description of the transcripts reflecting topics and actions (Charmaz, 2006: 48). With this approach, coding is an essential part of the data analysis in that the codes are the thinking tools with which to make sense of the data. Some of the codes were 'sentitizing concepts' (Blumer, 1954) drawn from literature, while others emerged from the transcripts through in-vivo coding. Wherever relevant, I drew on impressions gained from the interview site that resonated with the emerging themes, with the aim being to capture other meaning-making non-verbal expressions. I found embedding data analysis within the context of data collection crucial for the generation of insight grounded in the data. Such embedding is crucial because there were some data that could not be captured through interviewing. Some examples of this are manifest in the nuances expressed in spontaneity or answering either through 'silence' or 'gesturing'. I say 'mainly' because making sense of the interview transcripts cannot be isolated from the context of the interviews themselves.

Secondly, I coded the transcripts more analytically so as to identify the central themes of the stories of the individual respondents. Central to this thematising process is a distilling of the essence of the individual interviews and pulling out their core ideas through iteratively comparing and contrasting so as to identify patterns and regularities in the data. This involves a process of using some key sensitising concepts, reducing chunks of data to segments that capture their essence and abstracting what the data are indicating in terms of constructing a general picture from the individual accounts or generating theoretical ideas (Blumer, 1954; Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Rubin and Rubin, 2005; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Subsequently, I compared the codes from the different interviews, looking for patterns, and then grouped emerging themes with close similarities to form the main categories. I read the codes several times, locating texts within which these codes appeared.

Following this, I described first the emerging patterns and then compared and contrasted how far these themes were consistent both internally as well as externally with the existing research literature. For example, in the case of the ways in which young people go about their educational and career choice-making I was inspired by the work of Ball et al. (1999, 2000) in the generation of the different categories. I differentiated three broadly defined strategies of engaging with educational and career choice-making, which I thematised into three categories of choosers. I clustered young people whose accounts showed features such as ‘optimism’, ‘determinism’, ‘strong agency’ and a ‘sense of being in control’ into the category of ‘idealistic choosers’. This group of young people shared the belief – an overarching theme throughout the data – that individual effort is all that is needed to realise one’s ambitions. A second category I differentiated is contingent choosers, which shared the themes of ‘I don’t know what do now’, ‘I will see how it goes’, ‘it depends’, ‘one step at a time’ and ‘keeping options open’. The third category of young people identified consists of those who shared the themes of ‘sense of powerlessness’, ‘feeling stuck’, ‘suspending futures’, ‘embracing new opportunities’, and ‘adjusting aspiration to opportunities’. I grouped them together and called them ‘contextual choosers’, because, whether they were in employment or unemployed, they shared the overarching theme of ‘responding to contextual influences’, though they differed in their responses. They, however, differed in the ways they responded to the contextual influences and I differentiated two sub-categories:

becoming apathetic and finding a new niche in the labour market (cf. Chapters 6, 7 and 8). For further illustration, see the table below for an example of how I categorised the young people's choice making strategies.

Categorising young people's choice strategies

Category	Core theme	Example
Idealistic choosers	Optimism	'I've got a pretty straightforward idea. I'm gonna go into further education, all the way till I graduate from university... Getting a doctor's degree'. (Hassan, 15)
	Strong agency	'It will work out for me. I am not those kind of people who go down easily'. (Youssuf, 16)
	Commitment	'I don't want to waste my time anymore, or wonder aimlessly through life'. (Farah, 21).
	Not knowing	'[W]hen it came to choosing like what I wanted to do for A-levels, it was really hard for me because I was like 'I don't really know what to choose'. Cos you know you are so young you don't really think what you gonna go into'. (Deqa, 21)
Contingent choosers	Parallel planning	'If I don't become a dentist, I want to do something to do with business, ICT something like that'. (Ali, 15)
	Risk management	'ICT I chose because I want to do it in college, business I chose, I might be doing business in future life, and PE I chose because I enjoy it'. (Kaysar, 15)
	Immediacy of the present	'So I just had to find something I like to pick before the deadline went'. (Basra, 21)
Contextual choosers	Sense of powerlessness	'The future is not in my hands. It is in God's. I can plan the future, but it can turn out to be the other way around'. (Adam, 24)
	Apathetic outlook	'[To] become a teacher, basically you need to have a degree, <i>innit?</i> There is, I don't think you can get a degree in teaching'. (Anisa, 23)
	Finding a new niche	'That is when I started to get passion and interest for teaching and this is when I started to think about: 'Hey! you know what, you can actually be a teacher'. And that was not in my mind set up until that stage anyway'. (Choukri, 23)
	Networking	'I received an email from a friend I knew from ... Had I not received that email this email, I would not have known about it, probably not until a later date'. (Sahra, 25)

The different categories of choosers are reasonably distinct. However, it still remained difficult to fit respondents neatly into exclusive and static categories. This difficulty reflects the complexity of young people's lives and hence, the categorisation I present in this study is characterised by a certain degree of fluidity. Building on Ball et al.'s, conceptualisations, I suggest that, for example, the theme of 'optimism' that features in the accounts of the respondents is related to the two dimensions of 'age' and 'immigration biographies'. In the former, I suggest that optimism reflects what Hodgkinson and Sparkes (1997) call the 'horizon for action', that is, the young people's outlook at school-leaving age is limited by their lack of lived experience. I looked at the relationship between these themes and the respondents' life stage and found that, generally, the younger they are the more '*agentive*' they are and a similar optimism could be identified with newly arrived immigrant young people. What these two sub-themes shared was the theme of 'lived experience'.

Moreover, I compared themes emerging from the individual interviews to one another to extract notable patterns. While analysing the data I tried to remain close to the individual narratives, while dissecting themes that transcended individual accounts. For example, I compared the responses from the school-aged or early post-16 aged young people with university-aged students for similarities and differences on the questions asked, while also comparing the views of the young people according to their level of social relationship with members of the Somali community. The second dimension emerging from this study is that the idealistic ambitions reflect the self-betterment ideals that underpin migration. The difficulty with this process, however, is that in most cases emerging themes cut across boundaries. For example, the theme of 'agency' that appears to be dominant in the idealistic choosers also appears to cut across the different categories.

3.7 Reflections on the ethical dimensions of the research process

It is crucial to conclude this chapter by discussing some core issues pertaining to the ethical concerns of the research that I was confronted with. The theme of 'ethical considerations' is recurrent in the literature on conducting research with human subjects (de Vaus, 2001). At the heart of ethical considerations are the necessity and importance of: 1) informing the research participants of the research aims; 2) not causing inconvenience for the researched in any shape or form; 3) treating them with respect and dignity; 4) observing confidentiality and guaranteeing them anonymity; and 5) securing

informed consent from them. However, while these are essential research ‘rituals’, my study involved two more ethical issues. The first is the normative assumptions implicated in the nature of my research, which I have already discussed in Section 3.1 of this chapter. That is, I was aware that underlying the key concepts in this research, such as education, choice-making, community relations etc., were powerful assumptions loaded with their own contested meanings. The second ethical concern was related to my membership of the researched community, regarding which, I was confronted with three major challenges: researching a polarised community, the problem of being an insider-researcher (Kusow, 2003) and my position as a researcher, all of which I cover in detail next.

First, researching the Somali diaspora is fraught with sensitive politics. Indeed, the very use of the word ‘Somali’ has political connotations. Depending on where one stands, it is charged with emotions of rejection or approval. To some people, the word ‘Somali’ is contentious and loaded, either imposing a ‘rejected’ identity for some, or involving the rejection of an established and historical identity for others, because of the political conflict in Somalia. This has profound implications for shared identity, whereby memories of the ‘home country’ have come to evoke negative images. As I discuss in Chapter 4, relations among the Somali diaspora community are highly politicised. Since I am a member of this community, I am positioned in this polarised community landscape and therefore, my engagement with this research has some profound ethical dilemmas for me as a researcher. That is, since some of the topics of my research had to do with these polarised community relations, I had to be extra-vigilant when approaching the participants regarding these topics. To avoid the problem of becoming positioned in the polarised community relations, I adopted a ‘critical sensitivity’ approach (Cooper, 2001: 11) when phrasing the interview questions as well as in the way in which I have presented research findings. For example in this regard, I used the concept of ‘home country’ in a neutral way to refer to where someone originated from. In fact, as will become apparent in the empirical chapters, this concept had different meanings for the young people born or raised in the diaspora and hence, this lack of prejudice bore fruit in the analysis.

Moreover, I conducted the interviews in English and only in Somali with three community leaders and four young people who had recently arrived in the UK, whose language skills were limited. According to Temple and Edwards (2002: 5), ‘language is not a neutral medium, but a tool that defines both differences and commonality and

hence can be used for either excluding or including others'. By conducting the interviews in English, I sought a non-judgmental 'commonality' with my respondents, which spared me from being positioned in the polarised Somali community relations mentioned above (cf. Chapters 1 and 4). However, in the few aforementioned cases where I had to use the Somali language, I had access to the 'accumulated and particular cultural, social, and political meanings' (p. 5) that otherwise would have been lost in translation, for as Temple and Edwards argue '[l]anguage is an important part of conceptualisation, incorporating values and beliefs, not just a tool or technical label for conveying concepts' (p. 5).

Second, I found that my sharing a common culture with the researched was helpful in my making sense of the subtleties and nuances, for it facilitated my data collection and enriched my analysis. However, my membership of the researched community entailed the risk of falling into the trap of what Ely et al. (1991: 17) call 'blindness of familiarity'. In order to avoid this problem, I approached the research by adopting a 'stranger' attitude, through which, following Schuetz (1944: 500), I was aware of the need for critical questioning of the commonly held views, assertions and common explanations for the issues raised. However, I remained aware of the inevitability of researcher bias, for much as most researchers would like to achieve objectivity and impartiality in data collection and analysis, it remains hard to do so, for it is impossible for their interpretive scheme not to enter the focal activity (Charmaz, 2006; Gewirtz and Cribb, 2006). In general, my awareness of these pitfalls, and my adoption of a grounded approach and critical stance have helped me remain open to emerging themes.

Gaining access to and the trust of the target population were less problematic in some cases than others. With some organisations, there was some fear and suspicion about the data to be collected. For these organisations I had to certify and give assurances that the data were being used merely for my doctoral research. It took longer than anticipated with these gatekeepers and there were instances where I had to give up after several attempts to negotiate entry. This difficulty with negotiating entry was partly to do with a kind of funding insecurity, while with some organisations I was unable to interview people I wanted to interview. I had to carefully manage my researcher position in the context of my sharing Somali community membership with the researched. To manage these tensions, I have adopted a research paradigm that accommodates researcher/researched fluidity since each is likely to interpret the same phenomenon differently. Calling this process a 'double hermeneutic', Usher (1996: 19) implies that

all knowledge claims are perspective-bound and thus both the researcher and those researched add a different perspective to the generation of knowledge (Alexander, 2011; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Giddens, 1976).

Third, I share many similarities including those implicated in the migration narratives. That is, like some of the respondents, I have experienced multiple migration and have come to resettle in the UK as a secondary migrant and in that respect this research involved the risk of becoming a project of self-researching and addressing the question of ‘what would I have done in such situations’ However, much more challenging was how my research participants perceived me. Most gatekeepers greeted my request for input with enthusiasm in the sense of ‘finally there is someone who can tell us what we are doing wrong’. Particularly in the case of the respondents under the age of sixteen where I sought consent from their parents, there was the expectation that I would provide advice either for the research participants themselves or for their parents. Some parents even asked about the advantages of their children’s participation in the research and, thus, it emerged that the information letter I prepared explaining my research objectives was insufficient. Moreover, with some of the older respondents, there was the fear of ‘researcher judgementality’, which appeared to be related to my social position as a researcher where knowledge/power is implicated. To summarise, I have kept the research process open and evolving, for initial thoughts regarding the study changed significantly as I went through the process. I have explained that researching young people is challenging in that engaging in such research involves profound ethical dilemmas.

Chapter 4: Dynamics of the Researched Community

4.1 Introduction

This chapter sheds light on the dynamics of the researched community. By highlighting the resettlement trajectories of the Somali community in the UK and the key definers of this process, it describes the context within which young people construct their identities, aspirations and orientations. The discussion revolves around three interlinked themes. First, I discuss an emerging transnationalism that involves a shift in orientation more towards a permanent residency in place of a return to the country of origin. I argue that this shift is partly related to the coming-of-age of Somali children in the diaspora, the conflict and control ensuing from intergenerational differences and resultant attempts of the parent generation to monitor and steer the acculturation process of their children. I suggest that children are catalysts in this process. Second, I discuss the context of the host society, within which members of the emerging Somali community negotiate their sense of belonging and the implications of the protracted political instability in the home country in terms of return plans. I argue that the context within which Somali families are raising their children throws up unprecedented challenges, and with this new concern many first-generation Somalis have too much vested in the here-and-now to be concerned about their return plans. In the final section, I discuss how pre-migration narratives of the Somali community and the paradoxes that characterise community relations in the host country as well as post-migration experiences shape the ways in which members of this community negotiate belonging in the host society, while at the same time re-enacting social practices carried over from the country of origin.

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the researched community and set the scene for the context within which young Somali young people construct their choice biographies. I suggest that the three inter-related themes of emerging transnationalism, the receiving context of the host society and the historical pre-migration narratives of the Somali community inform family decision and young people's choice trajectories. The interaction of these factors is dynamic and complex. I will, for example, show that the shift towards permanent residency is partly related to the fact that education is increasingly replacing the old 'return plans' as the new 'family project'. I discuss how young people incorporate values and orientations towards education received through family interactions, and how they engage with education as a way of enhancing their life-chances to compensate for their disadvantaged position in the host society.

Moreover, I show how ambition is embedded in migration, since this very process is associated with self-betterment, a theme I develop further in subsequent chapters. The implications of the discussion presented in this chapter for the ways in which Somali young people engage with the education process in the here-and-now will be dealt with in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

4.2 Emerging transnationalism

When the first generation Somalis came to Britain in the late 80s their arrival was not meant to start a life of permanent residency in exile, but was perceived as a temporary sojourn to last until the political situation in the home country would go back to normality, thus making it safe enough for them to return ‘home’. Now, with their children coming of age in the diaspora and the continuing political instability in the home country, there has been a shift of orientation in the ethos of the community, and as I will discuss further in the next chapter, the ideas of ‘home’ and belonging have received new meanings. What emerges from the accounts of the interviewed community leaders is that first generation Somalis seem to be gradually realising that their dream of returning to their country of origin is just that, a dream: ‘the idea of going back home is now fading away’ for first generation Somalis (Mustafa, community worker).

This emerging transnationalism is strongly mediated by two competing processes: the children coming-of-age in the diaspora, on the one hand, and the tendency of first generation Somalis to maintain links with their native heritage, on the other. I will explain how these processes come to shape the emerging transnationalism; transnational in the sense of permanent settlement in the host country while maintaining links with the country of origin. To begin with, children coming of age in the diaspora increasingly claim a ‘say’ in family affairs including decisions on the future. The majority of these young people have known no other country than the host country or only have vague memories of their country of descent and consequently, for most of them, the ‘geographical belonging’ (Fangen, 2007a) is in the host country because:

[For] a young person who is born here or who is brought here from a young age [...] going back and establishing a new life in Somalia is a long dream. It is a long dream. (Houssein, tutor/community worker)

Houssein predicts that, with time, emotional links with the native country ‘will diminish’ in subsequent generations. The intergenerational continuity of maintaining emotional connection with the native country often proves to be problematic. For instance, by virtue of their age and because of the contemporary neoliberal context that puts emphasis on individual liberty, autonomy and self-actualisation young people are less likely to be moved by a strong sense of a collective self-constituted through shared historical narratives, which revolve around an imagined native country. Furthermore, as Yassin, a 17-year-old young person, has put it, ‘they [young people] are different obviously’, but for the majority of community leaders there is the perception that young people ‘lack emotional attachment’ (Houssein) to the country of descent and thus have no ‘meaningful past’ (Jenkins, 2008: 48) and as such lack any conception of the lost ‘homeland’. With the transition process into adulthood they have enough to be concerned about. Jenkins (2008: 48) argues that ‘for making sense of the here-and-now one draws upon the past’. However, the concern raised by community workers is that Somali young people born or raised in the diaspora miss crucial links with the ‘past’, i.e. links with the native country. This concern about the discontinuity of native cultural heritage contributes to the emerging transnationalism. Moreover, the decline in the geographical identification with the native country is in part what drives many first generation Somalis, including community workers, to engage consciously with the transnationalisation process (more on this point in the next section). Houssein notes:

[W]e talk about issues affecting their home country. We ask them challenging questions like ‘Why are you here?’ We see their reflection, their opinion and what contribution they want to make like ‘Will you become a doctor?’ We try to create awareness indirectly that they can make a difference and that they are part of a community. They are not here by chance, they are here because of circumstances ... (Houssein, tutor/community worker)

For most community workers like Houssein, the preservation of cultural heritage has become a priority for the parent generation. There is much focus on an interlinked education and cultural identity and the role of these two factors in facilitating positive incorporation in the host society; indeed, instead of working on their return dreams, the parent generation now, in many cases, is having to deal with new emergent problems of their growing up progeny. Hussain’s concerns relate to the transitional life of the Somali community, which is currently torn between the tendency of the first generation Somalis

to maintain links with the native country and the lack of practical meaning of these links for the younger generation.

A key dimension of this theme of emerging transnationalism is the role of children. In the early stages of resettlement in the UK Somali children's acculturation process was largely defined by what their foreign-born parents imparted to them, which in turn was bound up with the latter's familiarity with the contextual situation of the host society. However, lately their role in this process has decreased, because with their linguistic competency Somali young people coming-of-age in the diaspora are exposed to wider contextual influences. As they mature, they assume more responsibility for their future including what they call home. Most Somali young people who are either born or raised in the diaspora, because they 'have never sustained or created an emotional attachment with the country [of descent]' (Houssein), increasingly regard the UK as their home:

I wouldn't like to say it, but I have to say it 'I am a Westernised Somali'. I am someone who was born in Amsterdam, raised in London. If I am honest we went back to Somalia, Somaliland [in] 2004 ... for two months. I will be honest probably two worst months of my life. I could not adapt. The water, the weather ... The water was just making me sick. I was throwing up everyday. The land was just too dry. I just could not get used to it. (Khadar, 22, university gap year student, male)

Thus, while the maturing young increasingly identify themselves with the host society, their ageing parents have limited choices other than to 'meet their children halfway' (Shamsa, community worker) as a way of monitoring their acculturation process (Berry, 2005; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). Commenting on this intergenerational divergence, Portes et al. (2005) suggest that immigrant parents lose the control to influence their children 'when confronted with the sustained challenges of deviant lifestyles, media-driven consumerism, and peer influences' (p. 1013). This intergenerational difference is bound up with the factors of conflict and control that exacerbate the divergence in orientation towards the country of descent and the country of resettlement. Therefore, the best the parent generation can hope for (for the younger generation's sake) is a 'transnational' incorporation into the host society. However, emerging transnationalism involves more than practical engagement with the native country. Native cultural heritage offers a framework of reference that embodies ontological security of selfhood.

So from the perspective of the first generation Somalis, transnationalism maintains this heritage, but transnationalism is also maintained by the process of multiculturalism. As Kasim noted:

[T]he challenge is in the multicultural society there is always that question of 'where you come from?' There is difference of colour, there is difference of religion. At the schools they [attend] there is always an international day. There [are] always questions about background and culture. (Kasim, community worker)

For Kasim, the emotional bond with the native country 'will never go away', because the very idea of multiculturalism itself engenders the idea of different transnational origins, which in the end contributes to the evolving transitional narratives of identity and belonging. In this respect, transnational links are maintained not only through the active choice of the immigrant community, but also by the multicultural discourses in the UK host society.

While parents remain concerned with the preservation of their native culture and are trying their best to give frames of meaning, the children are inclined to undermine the very cultural boundaries parents are committed to preserve. Here, the resultant shift towards a more permanent residency in the UK is best illustrated by an increased emphasis on education in recent years. For the participating community leaders, the popularity of private tutoring indicates the shift in orientation towards better engagement with the opportunity structures on the part of the Somali community. However, it has to be noted that increased investment in education does not necessarily act as a substitute for the parent generation's loyalty towards their country of descent, for it is a strategy to boost their children's human capital, and affect their outcomes in the here-and-now. Since the process of helping children through the education trajectory involves time commitment on the part of parents, they are effectively suspending their plans to return home, even if only temporarily, until their children complete their studies. However, since seeing their first child through university potentially leads to further 'role reversal' in Somali families, the hope of returning home for the majority of the parent generation, inevitably, is going to become increasingly unrealistic. The situation is further compounded where parents have large numbers of children requiring help to get them through the same process.

Transnationalism then entails a shift towards a more permanent residency and a parallel struggle for the parent generation in maintaining their cultural identity, ensuring continuity, and managing the adaptation process of their children who are born and/or raised in the diaspora. However, the coming-of-age of the Somali young people in the diaspora is not the only factor in the emergence of transnationalism as another key aspect is the dynamics in the native country. These include the ongoing political instability in the country of origin, which similarly contributes to the emerging transitional narratives and to the changing orientation towards the host country. For Sirad, a community worker and tutor, the option of returning to the country of origin remains only a dream for most children: 'When I grow up and get enough money I will go back'. In Sirad's view, this return aspiration is rendered difficult to achieve by the continuation of the context of departure of the first generation, that is, a shift towards longer settlement is made necessary by the ongoing political instability in the country of origin: 'in Somalia there is no functioning government particularly in the South, but in the North, Somaliland, they are doing well'. Sirad continues to state: 'I don't encourage them to go back because there is a war, but I encourage them to become visible here in the UK and build their future'. Like most other participants in this research, Sirad remains positive about the social mobility of Somali young people.

The need for a 'transnational life' partly arises out of the tendency of the first generation immigrants being obliged to support financially their kin in the home country. The emerging transnationalism manifests itself in the fact that the majority of the parent generation maintain links with the country of origin through the monies they provide to their relatives left behind in the country of origin. As such, the emerging transnationalism is experienced in negative terms, that is, it has detrimental implications for the resettlement process of the Somali community. First, transnational links have a socioeconomic impact on immigrant families trying to make ends meet, whereby they affect their capabilities of establishing themselves in the host country: 'because if parents get calls from back home from their family members who stay behind asking for support, it affects children here [financially] and emotionally' (Sirad, Community Worker). Commenting on the role of remittance, not only in terms of maintaining links with the 'home country', but also in relation to shaping family dynamics in the here-and-now, Houssein notes:

In terms of stress level parents are constantly being bombarded with messages from home, families not being stable because of resources. When you see we

have no stable family at home, it has obviously implications for the young people. (Houssein, tutor/community worker)

Idriss makes a similar observation, stating that while Somali immigrant families are trying to cope with establishing themselves in the host society, they are expected:

to help the displaced and needy family members back home. You can imagine getting social security benefits ... and you have to support other family members back home. On top of that you have to hire private tutors for children. How can you prioritise those demands? Those challenges are often real and influence the choices parents make. (Idriss, community worker)

But on the other hand, maintaining links with the country of origin is arguably both a solace to the pain of permanent residency in the UK, and an indicator that ‘transnational activism’ (Hammond, 2013) will continue in the foreseeable future. One can argue that transnational involvement offers the best possible negotiated solution for permanent residency in the host country. A final dimension associated with the emergence of transnational Somali community pertains to the role and popularity of Somali-speaking satellite television, which Mustafa says ‘is having an impact on the diaspora’.

We’ve got Universal TV that opened us up to what goes on in Somalia. (Choukri, 23, PCGE student, female)

Choukri notes here. She continued to add:

... you know we were watching Somali TV, me and my mum, the other day. And she was basically telling me, how there is not really like. This is something I really would love in Somalia is set up a special needs school, because my mum was telling me, we were watching together anyway, and there was children they all got autism, some of them ADHD, some of them blind, physical impairment and they wanted to enter the educational arena. But there is obviously in Somalia, you know it is difficult. (Choukri, 23, PCGE student, female)

A similar impact can be observed in the role of social media with the younger generation.

I do actually talk to my family back home and I communicate with them through the internet as well erm seeing pictures all the time. Recently my mother went there a year ago, I think a couple of years ago, and my cousins as well and they bring back a lot of memories videos and everything. (Hamda, 21, university student, female)

Social media and electronic communication remove geographical barriers that in the past contributed to the maintenance of return dreams by bringing the native *imagined* country closer to the *actual* homes in the diaspora. Consequently, to some extent the social media plays a role in the emergence of transnationalism (Bacigalupe and Camara, 2012; Christensen, 2011). According to Bacigalupe and Camara (2012) social media has transformed the experiences of the immigrant family by creating an opportunity for ‘ambient co-presence’ among family members dispersed across national boundaries (p. 1428). A few years ago before smartphones and home internet connections became so popular, Somalis businesses dominated cheap international ‘call shops and internet cafés’ in London, as Mustafa, a community worker noted. The popularity of these industry among Somali entrepreneurs went hand in hand with the emergence of the money transferring industry, known as ‘*Hawala*’, and both phenomena have played a significant part in the emergence of a transnational community and social changes associated with migration for immigrant and their families both in the sending as well in the receiving countries (Horst, 2006; Lindley, 2007; Tharmalingam, 2011).

Transnationalism facilitated and maintained by the social media and technology compensates for the loss of native homeland experienced by immigrants. Because of their financial commitment to those left behind in the native country, they are held in high regard and their absence is thus balanced out by their economic significance. Indeed, as Horst (2006: 10) has found, the flow of remittances with its accompanying images of life from those in the West not only sustains transnationalism, but also generates longing for a life in the diaspora. Moreover, the mere fact that immigrants from the comfort of their homes, like Hamda, can maintain links with families and friends left behind in the native country or with others in countries where a similar transnational community is established renders wishes to return not necessary. As Mustafa continues to state, there have recently been changes towards the tendency for a more permanent residency in the host country. Somalis ‘are having their own mosques, mosques which are run solely by Somalis’. Although young people are increasingly

becoming aware of their geographical belonging in the host country, Mustafa thinks that holiday visits to their parents' native country similarly engender a 'patriotic sense of origin' among young people. While it is often the first generation who are more interested in the political developments in the country of origin, the situation in their home country mediates, more than they realise, the resettlement process of the Somali community in the host country, and in some way also affects their transition process.

4.3 The context of the host society

Now that the Somali community is becoming part of the British multicultural landscape, it has come to face problems of a new kind in its incorporation into the host society. These problems are defined by two interrelated processes in the context of reception; these are hegemonic 'race' relations and differences in 'intergenerational incorporation' (Alam, 2013; Portes, 2010; Zhou, 1997). The ways in which the Somali community negotiates hegemonic 'race' relations can be best understood in terms of Fraser and Honneth's (2003) recognition and redistribution dilemma. To a large extent the struggle for recognition partly explains the exponential growth of Somali community organisations. I discuss the processes underlying the emergence of community organisations in the next paragraph. For the purpose at hand, suffice it to say that the context of reception is a key marker of community responses to contextual/structural factors in the host society (Zetter, Griffiths and Sigona, 2005). The context of reception such as immigration, social and integration policies as well as 'race' relations and employment opportunities mediate both community and family processes. Somalis have come to resettle in a context that is strongly *racialised* and *classed* and are because of their racial and socioeconomic background not favourably positioned. As one community leader notes '[f]or a start if you look the UK is a Christian country' (Hamud, community worker/tutor). These contextual factors have implications for 'spousal relationships' (Alam, 2013) which often lead to family breakdowns.

The fact is that the functioning of the Somali family has broken down [is] because of the stress of resettlement, because of different culture, because of the way the trauma of resettlement or displacement, the majority, one could say 60% that is a conservative estimate, of Somali families are headed by a single parent, a mother. (Hamud, community worker/tutor)

For Hamud, it is not only that a single mother ‘is not able to cope with a large number of children’, but another dimension of the problem is such a situation puts Somali young people in an even more disadvantaged position in the struggle for social mobility. In Hamud’s view, it is in this context that life-chances of Somali young people are strongly defined by the unfolding narratives of their families in the host society. The receiving context of the host society presents not only opportunities, but also challenges, which require adaptation on the part of the immigrant community. This resonates with the experience of a community worker who states:

More things come out like domestic violence, you know domestic violence is getting out a bit more on the surface and you know husbands not helping out or not being around for their kids. So things like that are coming out a bit more. They are feeling a bit more confident to talk about things like that. You know really in Somalia things like that are taboo. You don’t talk about [them]. So I guess it means they are adapting to some sort of British society. So that is coming up. And also mental health is another issue. People are kind of admitting that there is a mental health problem, you know, in the family or within themselves. It doesn’t have to be severe mental health, but the first stages like depression and things like that. (Shamsa, community worker)

The theme of ‘change’ implicated in the adaptation to the host society is recurrent in the accounts of the interviewed community leaders. Clearly, the Somali families face a range of unanticipated problems emanating from the contexts within which their children are coming-of-age. Somalis arrived in the UK having crossed cultural, religious, linguistic and racial boundaries. Change is, therefore, inevitable, because the very process of adaptation of immigrants to the host society presupposes this (Hopkins, 2010). Portes (2010: 1544) argues that migration and change go hand in hand and that the very process of migration ‘leads to transformations in both the sending and receiving societies’. One way to manage the changes that undermine intergenerational social mobility is by capitalising on educational opportunities. There is a commonly held view that due to current unemployment and lack of alternatives, young people who are not in education are prone to ‘fall into the wrong crowd’ (Nouh, Youth Worker). But this ‘falling into the wrong crowd’ is for some young people incremental and often goes unnoticed:

Recently we were visited by a community relations officer from the local police station. He told us that they found Somali young people's offending behaviour quite confusing, because most of Somali origin young people who come to the attention of the juvenile justice do not fit offenders' profile. He told us that quite often police have already a record of those who are likely to get into crimes ... The problem of this trend of unpredictable offending behaviour is that such offenders escape the attention of support services for early intervention. It is difficult to predict their behaviour. Somali young people who offend start at the top end. (Salah, community worker/tutor)

Clearly, another factor underlying the parent generation's readjustment of their initial plans to return to the country of origin relates to the implications of the intergenerational differences that eventually lead to differences in worldviews and 'modes of acculturation' (Rumbaut, 2004: 1161). Unlike their immigrant parents, diaspora-born/raised youngsters adapt to the host culture much sooner than their parents and it follows that the longer immigrants remain in the host society, the more they become alienated from their country of origin, both socially and culturally. As Strauss (1962) points out, 'immigrants go through tacit changes that are hardly visible and until confronted with critical turning points they do not realise changes in their personal identities' (p. 67). The changes the Somali community has gone through are visible to newcomers.

I used to teach Koran to a group of children. One day one of the pupils told me 'I've got a football game to go to, so please don't waste my time. You're just repeating the same thing. I got to go'. I was teaching him the Koran, which in his understanding was time wasting compared to playing football or learning English or other subjects. (Mahdi, 22, unemployed, male)

Aboukar who is similarly a newcomer shares this view regarding how far Somali young people born or raised in the diaspora have become estranged from their native culture:

I wouldn't be able to get along with those who are born in this country, because there is not much we share. We have different values and worldviews. For example, my plan is to start a family at a young age, but this is for them that not

important. I plan to work and invest in my country [Somalia], but again that is for them not a priority. (Aboukar, 23, unemployed male).

Within this context of their growing up children, the parent generation, then, gradually realises that returning to the country of origin is no longer feasible. With this realisation, members of this generation come to redefine their priorities in the host country. The context of reception is a site for the struggle to fit in with the established 'race' relations where 'race' and class background shape life-chances either overtly or through the subjectivity of the agency. According to Fraser (2003: 55), 'migration and the emergence of diaspora communities lead to hybridisation of cultures'. Changes and challenges that the Somali community faces in the context of the host society manifest themselves in what is termed in the literature 'intergenerational incorporation'. Since Somali young people growing up in the UK gradually become incorporated into British multicultural society, their problems resemble those of their peers in similar situations. They face an increased risk of social exclusion and falling in with 'the wrong crowd'. This scenario leads to two possible consequences: a complete submersion into the dominant youth sub-culture they are exposed to, i.e. 'downward assimilation', or it leads to 'segmented assimilation' (Portes, 2007; Zhou (1997). Negotiating between these two responses involves a 'delicate dance' (Alam, 2013) and remains a constant struggle for the majority of Somali young people and their parents. To manage changes that the Somali young people experience in their everyday lives, community organisations and the parent generation have to come up with ways to surmount the risks the young are confronted with. For the Somali immigrant community, one of the critical turning points they face is the coming-of-age of their children, whose problems increasingly resemble those of the socially deprived communities in their neighbourhoods. In this context, some of the interviewed community workers are critical of the UK government's policy for engaging newly arrived communities:

The immigrant community, people from refugee background, or Muslim background, or whatever background, they come from ... they need to integrate, but ... who do they integrate with? You don't see people you want to integrate with ... For example, if you live in an overcrowded larger housing estate where the main population is from black and ethnic minority background and want to integrate with white middle-class people in Essex, Reading or outside London, it won't be possible to integrate. (Idriss, community worker)

The context within which the Somali community in London negotiates its recognition and space within the wider British multicultural society is, in part, defined by the prevailing mode of stratification which runs along class and racial lines. As Idriss notes in the above quote, neighbourhoods where Somalis settle are often a source of more concern for the younger generation of this community than opportunities for social mobility. However, concerns of ‘downward assimilation’ of the Somali youth not only revolve around engagement with education, employment prospects or risk of social exclusion, there are also issues regarding cultural and linguistic discontinuities in their daily lives. A second theme in relation to the worries raised about downward assimilation is a perceived difference between school-aged children and those in their twenties. The latter group is particularly disaffected and as such are viewed as a ‘generation in limbo’ in that they have missed out on investment in their education, because during the initial stages of resettlement the parent generation was more focussed on returning home than on long term resettlement in the host country. That is, unlike the school-aged children who currently benefit from the shift towards more permanent residency, those in their twenties have missed out on an early investment in education.

This problem has already been highlighted by Jones (1998), who has reported a lack of engagement with the school system, which she suggest was more a cultural than conscious choice, although one might also argue that this lack of engagement might well have been out of necessity. In the initial settlement stage, as Jones suggests, Somali parents did not see why they should engage (interfere is probably the right word here) with the school as long as there were no problems. With the commitment to a permanent stay in the adopted country as opposed to a home return, however, education as a significant impetus for social mobility has become a key community and family strategy. Commenting on this parental/community strategy to affect the life-chances of the younger generation, one community leader notes:

[N]ow a lot of parents are realising that if their children won’t perform at schools they won’t progress in future they could also affect their education, could also cause trouble to involve in other problems like antisocial behaviour, or to commit crime or maybe go to jail and what not. (Qamar, community worker)

This redefinition involves focusing on meaningful participation in the host society to improve the chances of their children. Like any other first generation immigrants, the Somali community has struggled with coming to terms with their exiled life. The dilemmas of returning home or establishing permanent residency in the host countries are a natural reaction to displacement. Previous studies on immigrant acculturation show similar patterns of reorientation towards the host society (Al-Rashid, 1994; Alam, 2013; Anwar, 1979; Bolognani, 2007; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). The classical work of Anwar (1979) is a good example of early studies into the dilemmas immigrants face in their new homelands and how they establish new lives by drawing on traditional practices. Although his study was limited to the Northern city of Rochdale in the UK, it still has some conceptual implications for understanding the patterns of migration behaviour of emergent immigrant communities.

Since then other studies have shown similar immigrant behaviour of the dilemma of settling in a new homeland and having to accept the making of new histories and memories' (Werbner, 2013: 2013) or continue to hold on to the myth of return. Al-Rasheed found that although refugee communities might regard their exiled life as temporary, they eventually reorient towards their staying in the host country and thus, come to resemble immigrant communities (Al-Rasheed, 1994: 200). The dilemma of staying put or returning home, often commonplace among first generation immigrants, arguably has an impact on the prospects of second-generation youth, which often takes the form of social reproduction of the disadvantaged position of their parents' generation. This resettlement trajectory is evident in the Somali community, whereby there is the shift of focus towards permanent residency revolving around opportunities and expectations, on the one hand and obstacles and discontinuities, on the other.

The threat of downward assimilation is partly a product of the strong links that first generation immigrants maintain with their home country and plans of moving back. It can be argued that first generation immigrants compromise their engagement with the social, economic and political processes in the host society; i.e. they neglect investing in their human capital and thereby undermine their participation in the labour market. It can equally be argued that due to their immigration narratives immigrants are driven to realise what is referred to in the literature as 'immigrant dreams' (Warikoo, 2011) to have better life-chances for their children. Both these two possible immigrant responses to the resettlement country appear to hold for the Somali community. With the former

response, the transition-related problematic that Somali youth are confronted with is to some extent a reproduction of the 'disadvantage' passed down from the parent generation. In the latter case, however, the refocusing on the here-and-now by the parent generation is probably a rekindled version of the immigrant drive to achieve and pursue a better life by leaving the country of origin. Associated with the theme of coming-of-age is the idea of intergenerational differences between the parent generation and their children.

Because these children are born and brought [up] in an entirely different setup. Although these children are doing well in terms of switching back from one culture to another, yet we have to appreciate children [are] mainly exposed to a culture which [...] in a way [is] in contradiction with their essentially Somali culture. These children, somehow, have to navigate between two cultures ... In a way I can call them 'fairly bi-cultural'. Parents are not bi-cultural in that sense. ... and are not flexible to any degree or form. (Hamud, tutor/community worker)

Intergenerational dissonance is, in part, a reflection of the loose relations among the Somali community, the different rate of acculturation (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001), and the stage of the resettlement process reached. As I discuss later in this chapter, due to the loose connections among this community, there are signs of a trend towards an individualistic way of life increasingly becoming the norm. However, intergenerational problems are not necessarily to be understood only in terms of cultural discontinuities. Much as the Somali community negotiates recognition within the context of the British multicultural society, so are British institutions beginning to define the dimensions of this recognition. Mas Giralt (2013) argues that 'who is seen and how they are seen' by the state gaze affects how migrants and ethnic minority groups can negotiate their place in Britain and the resources they are able to access'. For Mas Giralt the 'British ethnocultural system of recognition simply does not respond to actual needs for recognition, but is hasty in misrecognising groups within the colonial framework of recognition'. In this struggle for recognition power dynamics are involved. For most of the community leaders power imbalances in this recognition and misrecognition is experienced as problematic. There is an understanding that Somali young people are at an increased risk of exclusion; as one community leader observes:

Overall, Somali children are doing exactly as they should do, because in a way ... they haven't sensed the importance of education within the British context. They don't understand they can change their future or improve their socio-economic situation through education. Some of them are aware of that, but a good number are not. (Hamud, community worker/tutor)

In this quote Hamud explains the Somali young people's engagement in terms of family cultural capital and the lack of awareness about the value of education. Others like Houssein link the problems encountered by Somali young people to family cultural capital in that because of their precarious socioeconomic situation, Somali immigrant families are unable to 'provide a conducive learning environment and [for] most of the Somali parents [it is] very difficult [to help their children] in terms of English and Maths' (Houssein, tutor/community worker). One, however, needs to be cautious about explanations that are couched in terms of 'familial deficiencies' (Morrow, 1999: Vincent et al., 2012). For families in general, and Somali immigrant families in particular, making a positive input into their children's educational attainment is so much an ongoing family priority that they are prepared to make sacrifices to that effect. So while socioeconomically Somali families may not be best placed, they engage in what responsible parents do for their children. Regarding this Qamar notes:

It is very difficult for a lot of parents because it is too costly, but then again they see the development of their children. So a lot of people try to do that, to educate their children their own ways because a lot of Somali parents are, you know, they don't educate themselves, so they try to support and seek extra help as well. (Qamar, community worker)

An emergent theme from the interviews is that with time the Somali community will eventually manage and pick up socioeconomically and become established in the UK. In particular, there is much optimism that Somali parents will be able to negotiate their way through the education system 'once they understand how the system works', as Mustafa, a community worker puts it. These positive expectations run parallel to concerns raised around issues related to the young people of this community. Much of the concerns revolve around discontinuity of cultural heritage and its associated risk of incorporation into the negative youth subculture. Idriss, another community worker, acknowledges that Somali young people are facing 'tough times' in their transition to adulthood, and

explains these problems in terms of the socioeconomic position of the Somali community and the high rate of material poverty among it. However, the concerns raised are explained away as being temporary and as being part of the natural transition emergent communities experience in the host society. Like Qamar in the above quote, Idriss comments that Somali parents are doing whatever they can do to provide additional support for their children. Indeed, parents forego their own self-development in the interest of their children and this sacrifice leads to their expectations being high, perhaps beyond what is realistically achievable.

The role of parents in the creation of a positive attitude towards education will be discussed in Chapter 6, but for the purpose at hand suffice it to say that most Somali parents hope to achieve social mobility through their children. They do so while they are faced with challenges to their parental authority in the context of the host country within which parenting responsibilities are conferred. This context is marked by discontinuities in the daily lives of the Somali family in which there is not only a parent-child role reversal, but also marital relationships are affected by the welfare state they have come to live in. These family processes are reflected in and linked to processes at the community level. Most young people are not incorporated into any collective or overarching Somali cultural arrangement and, hence, community leaders raise concerns that they face an increased risk of alienation. As has already been discussed in the literature review, community networks facilitate the transmission of norms, values and the sense of identity required for counterbalancing contextual challenges young people of immigrant communities encounter (Zhou and Bankston, 1994; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001).

Previous research on the resettlement process of the Somali community in the host culture by Fuglerud and Engebrigtsen (2006) in Norway and Alitolppa-Niitamo (2004) in Finland shows similar manifestations of dislocation and adaptation difficulties in the host culture. Fuglerud and Engebrigtsen (2006: 1124) point out that Somali immigrant families are still in the process of establishing themselves in the host country, being 'unsettled' and lacking effective social networks. According to these commentators, the exiled Somali community has reproduced in the host country the social relationships and cultural practices, which partly contributed to their eventual dislocation from their country or origin (p. 1124). While this perspective underscores the importance of the inter-relatedness of the historical and spatial dimensions of the immigrants' resettlement

process, it reduces the problematic adaptation of the exiled Somali community to their demographic profile and hence largely overlooks the contextual factors that impede this process. Arguably, the underlying assumptions of this view reflect a cultural deficit approach.

The study by Alitolppa-Niitamo (2004) shows similar implications of contextual factors for the emergence of bonding forms of social capital within the Somali community and family settings. She argues that structural factors, including welfare policy, disrupt family dynamics of communities from a patriarchal society as well as the nature and quality of social capital the family has access to. Consequently, the context within which changes are taking place not only involves a pull towards downward assimilation of the young, but also tacit changes at the community level. These are tacit in the sense that not all community concerns about discontinuities are seriously addressed even when there is an opportunity to do so. A good example is linguistic discontinuities, which are well illustrated by Hamud, who points out that although not all GCSE exam boards have accepted the Somali language ‘to be introduced as a language where children can learn and can get qualifications like other community languages like Urdu or Hindi’:

[P]arents are beginning to understand the importance of Somali ... So speaking Somali is an asset and Somali children should learn it. Unfortunately a number of AQA [Assessment and Qualifications Alliance] has still not accepted Somali. But the good thing is that the OCR [Oxford, Cambridge and RSA], which is one of the big examining boards, have what they call ... exams which is kind of a graded from what they call breakthrough all the way up to advanced. So that child can do different levels all the way up to even AS or A level equivalent. ... Where there is a will there is a way. ... In a school I stayed, they introduced Somali as a trial. But still some of the parents are not as interested or encouraging their children to learn Somali whether in a formal setting or at home. We have started here Somali classes. We asked Somali parents to send their children, but not much has happened. [W]e have realised that learning Somali will open them a new horizon, and give them a different identity. (Hamud, community worker/tutor)

Interestingly, however, although there appears to be not much demand for community language classes, there remain concerns around linguistic discontinuity.

[W]ith the Westernised lot they seem to have the mentality like that of white people almost, shall I say or like English people, and it is so weird to see sometimes to think like if my generation now can't grasp their own mother language, can you imagine what the next generation is gonna be like? If their mum and dad can't speak their mother language, which language are they gonna talk to their kids in? They gonna be speaking English. So you gonna have a Somali child who is Somali through and through, but can't speak a word of this mother language and neither can his Dad or his Mum. [interviewer asked: Is that a problem?] That is a big problem. I think that is one of the biggest problems we face as Westernised Somalis. I think losing our identity almost is a big big problem, I think. (Khadar, 22, university gap year student, male)

Much as there are concerns related to linguistic and cultural heritage, there is at the same time a reproduction of some customs from the 'home country', i.e. a continuation of aspects of social relationships as circumscribed by the clan logic that is salient to the very dislocation of the Somali people. From the point of view of the politics of recognition (Fraser and Honneth 2003), members of minority ethnic groups are engaged in a struggle for recognition on multiple levels: individual, interpersonal, familial and community. The struggle for recognition at the family level, where parents and their children negotiate intergenerational differences by respectively exerting parental authority and seeking individual autonomy, is paralleled by a similar struggle for recognition at the community level. Community organisations, in their turn, derive their legitimacy from the fact that they seek social justice, but as will become clearer, they are themselves having to struggle to legitimise their existence in a community whose relations are mediated by traditional social practices.

Within the context of changing intergenerational dynamics, Somali young people are redefining their position both within their community and within the wider society. However, their prospects remain problematic in that they face insurmountable problems in their transition into adulthood, as well as in negotiating subtle and explicit familial, social and institutional pressures. They experience the additional pressure emanating from their immigration narratives and cultural background, while the push factors which triggered their migration or the migration of their parents, which include political

instability in the country of descent, continue to define their everyday lives in the diaspora.

4.4 Somali community relations

While the Somali community is gradually becoming a recognisable group in the UK demographic landscape and appears to be a coherent one, there is, in fact, a deeply embedded division. Beyond the facade of shared language, ethnicity and culture, I will demonstrate that Somali community relations are shaped by different pre-migration undercurrents that can be traced to ‘segmented social organisation’ characteristic of the Somali people (Lewis, 1961) and to differences in the context of their departure from their native country (Engebrigtsen, 2007; Fuglerud and Engebrigtsen, 2006; Griffiths, 2000; Kleist, 2008). As I explain later, these pre-migration narratives lead to an inclusion/exclusion problematic in the role community organisations play in the lives of the Somali community. First, I address the question of why people need to be linked to a community in an organised form in the first place.

There is a general consensus among community leaders that the mobilisation of community resources is in the interests of all. This widely held view that community membership and concerted effort are beneficial for the individual is rooted in the normative presupposition that a common front is necessary to counter disadvantages emanating from the host culture. The emergence of community organisations among the Somali community in the early 1990s was a response to the needs of the newly arriving Somali refugees who required help with their initial settling in the host country. That is, concerned leaders of the community took on the responsibility of responding to demands for a concerted effort towards facilitating the resettlement process. Through this process, community organisations, embodying a sense of belongingness, solidarity and collectivity, needed to deal with common threats in the host society, and to mobilise community resources to achieve social mobility (Cederberg, 2012; Shah, Dwyer and Modood, 2010; Zetter, Griffiths and Sigona, 2005). As has already been discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, within this conception of community, there is a normative presupposition that well connected young people in the community stand better chances of social mobility than their peers with no community links. With this understanding, it is held that community provides a positive context necessary for shaping young people’s aspirations and outlook towards their education. Responding to this normative pressure for minority ethnic communities to come together to form a common front in the newly adopted country, Somali community leaders, especially those with enough cultural

capital, have voluntarily taken the responsibility to initiate community organisations, leading to the emergence of a plethora of them, all trying to serve the same community. What most of these organisations have in common are the similarities of their ‘mission statement’:

Our organisation helps young people with their education, we motivate them to achieve good grades in GCSE and A-levels and participate in universities in the future. (Sirad, community worker)

Our main objective of starting this organisation was to enhance basically the educational achievement of the Somali students in mainstream schools in the London Boroughs of [...]. (Houssein, tutor/community worker)

Our mission is to empower and inspire Somali young people to achieve [their] true potential by equipping them with the tools for tomorrow, to enable them to take responsibility for their lives and develop as individuals and make a successful transition to adulthood. (Website of one of the community organisations)

As is clear from these examples of mission statements of Somali community organisations, there is much focus on ‘serving the Somali community’, but because of the lack of cooperation there is much duplication in their service provision. At the heart of the mobilising of community organisations is the role of Somali ethnic identity. The Somali ‘national’ identity has historically been subsumed under clan identity (Lewis, 1961), and since the collapse of former Somalia’s last central government in the early 90s, such an identity has assumed even more significance over ‘national’ identity. The logic of the clan is entangled with an inclusion/exclusion problem similar to the ‘othering’ prejudice that the community collectively faces in the host country. The tragedy of the clan logic is that, as Bourdieu argues, ‘one can always bring a remote relative closer, or move closer to him, by emphasising what unites, and one can equally well distance the closest relative by emphasising what separates’ (Bourdieu, 1990: 172). Such deployment of kinship logic for community relations has ramifications for political representation:

I think the Somali community, wherever they are [...] do not have political representation. If you go to the local authority and if you do not have a couple of local counsellors, it is unlikely the people will value you, because the local authority is the largest employer in every borough. So if you do not have local representation, or the local MP supporting you or come from your background,

not necessarily ... it is unlikely that you get local employment opportunities.
(Idriss, community worker)

Previous studies on the Somali community in the diaspora show similar findings (Fuglerud and Engebrigtsen, 2006). It has been argued that the formation of Somali organisations and reciprocal relations among Somalis are primarily based on traditional ties and entangled with the pre-migration demographic profile, which renders the resultant social capital among the community 'unproductive' (Sandefur and Laumann, 1998: 484). Fuglerud and Engebrigtsen relate these unproductive relations to cultural and historical factors. For instance, they explain how the traditional nomadic lifestyle of Somalis has historically impeded the formation of social networks that transcend close kinship ties, and argue that the nomadic way of life as well as the political instability in the home country have contributed to a 'lack of a central representative body' among those in exile (2006: 1125).

Kleist (2008: 313) makes a similar observation when he notes that 'Somalis in the diaspora show great associational engagement which simultaneously bears witness to divisions'. Information sharing involves some degree of kinship relations or personal acquaintance. However, Somali community organisations experience difficulties in mobilising collective resources beyond close kinship-related networks and the resulting tensions have implications for the way Somali identity is contested. Certainly, this void of shared representation mediates the ways in which Somalis organise themselves in the diaspora. In the absence of a shared overarching identity necessary for the development of a better degree of community cohesion, Somali young people are 'left to fetch for [themselves]' (Mustafa, community worker) in negotiating their way in an increasingly 'risky society' (Beck, 1992). Kleist (2008) argues that in order to compensate for the loose community relations at local level, the Somali diaspora community maintains extensive transnational networks that are essentially based on clan affiliations. However, comparing among ethnic minority communities neglects the historical narratives of them.

It is very difficult to compare the Somali community with the Chinese and Indians. These communities are in their fifth generation and we're either first or second generation. What we are talking about is second generation, or recent arrivals. So we cannot compare Somalis with the Chinese or Indian communities. We are in the early stages of our migration. (Houssein, tutor/community worker)

Moreover, the observed tension among members of the Somali community is further compounded by the very process of community. With its inbuilt inclusion/exclusion problematic, the idea of community can be counterproductive in relation to the objectives it aims to achieve. The lack of partnership working among the Somali community is highlighted by Nouh, a youth worker who notes that Somali immigrants 'don't utilise their togetherness, working as a team', because,

They still have the mentality of back home and also even the [service] users, I feel, don't have the insurance that the services delivered to them is a hundred per cent service. So for instance you come across a lot of [service] users telling you: 'Oh you're gaining your financial income because of me'. You get a lot of those telling you these silly comments and I am like: 'Well the government or the funders have given this organisation money and this organisation money because of that money we receive we are able to work with you. It's not because we told the government we gonna work with so and so and give us money in return. (Nouh, youth worker)

Nouh points to the historical baggage that Somali immigrants have brought along from their country of origin and have enacted in the host country. Some of the historical social practices reproduced in the host country include the deep division of the Somali community along kinship lines as well as regions of origin. This division undermines their efforts for collective action and even mediates most of their interpersonal relations. Clearly, these divisive social practices show that the associational life of the Somali diaspora is subject to two forces that pull them in different directions: a centripetal tendency to form an all-encompassing sense of community and a centrifugal one that tends to move it away from an integrationist notion of a Somali community based on an overlapping common core among sub-groups, and instead affirms and enacts the logic of clan relations and clan particularism. Hence, the Somali community could be described as a community in search of an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983). Perhaps the illusion of a cohesive community is not limited to diaspora Somalis, for according to Blackshaw (2010: 7), the concept of 'community had become an extreme form of dialectics – that is both real and imagined'. Community organisations under these circumstances merely 'serve as rhetorical devices' (Campbell and McLean, 2002: 20). What is unique in the case of the Somali community, however, is that the problematic relationship can be understood in the context of the historical, social and political dimensions of the push factors for their emigration. Clearly, these processes have shaped

the dynamics of this exiled community. Also as a result of these processes the Somali identity as an inclusive and organising framework has become tribalised, regionalised, and recently politicised.

The accounts of the research participants from community organisations reveal that community relations are hampered by a lack of trust among the community, expressed in the words of one community worker as: ‘they don’t have the best of relationships’ (Nouh, youth worker). According to Putnam (2000: 135), social trust is a community resource, which is necessary for stable and effective social relationships that are beneficial to all. Working in partnership is a sensitive business for most community organisations as it can potentially provoke unnecessary tension, because, in the words of another community worker, ‘there is high mistrust between people from different parts of Somalia’ (Zakaria, community worker). Introducing the organisation he represents, Zakaria states that one of the projects it is involved in is ‘work[ing] with young people from ethnic minorities’ and not only those of Somali descent. On one occasion, I visited one of their youth club sessions and observed that although most attendees were of Somali descent there were a few young people from other ethnic minority backgrounds. Another time, I observed non-Somali adult clients attending the centre who, in Zakaria’s words, were ‘sent by the job centre to do basic IT courses’. Strikingly, Zakaria’s organisation shares facilities with five other autonomous Somali community organisations, but although they overlap in terms of the services they provide and primarily share their target group, each works independently of the other. What results from the emergence of a multitude of community organisations among the Somali people is a re-enactment of deeply embedded divisions, which are historically rooted in the segmentation of Somali society. According to Zakaria, an attempt to merge has failed purely because of ‘lack of trust’, which he explains in terms of clan discourses. Another community worker commenting on this lack of cooperation notes:

[W]e tried to act as a platform organisation that helped to support all the organisations across the board no matter who they are. We did for that reason we [established] an organised called Council for Somali Organisations ... It was an umbrella organisation supporting all the local communities in [London borough]. It went well to start with. We secured some funding from the local authority. And the idea was testing out how the Somali community cooperate with each other. It didn’t work well to be honest with you. There was a lot of self-interest, there was a lot of fighting going on among the groups. It is still going on, but it’s

not that great compared to how it was when we first started. (Qamar, community worker)

According to Qamar, the lack of cooperation among the Somali community organisations in London is related to divergent group interests, lack of trust and competition for charity funding. In her experience, an attempt by the local authority for the Somali community organisation to form an umbrella organisation, which ‘started off with twelve organisations’, is the only successful cooperation, but even with this positive example, as she acknowledged, some external pressure was involved because, in her words: ‘Obviously the local authority [is] not interested to support all the local organisations’. Qamar continues:

Many Somalis naturally don’t work like working [in] partnership really. If you want to probably get involved or want to ask them certain things they [start to] think you are tapping into their charity or maybe you are a threat to them. So you know we try our best. There are some community organisations we work closely with (...). And also because we are the main organisation, they say if we like try to work [with them] we are a threat to them, maybe dragging the idea I don’t know. So it is hard, hard to put [it into words]. (Qamar, community worker)

As Hamud notes ‘funding is nowadays very difficult to come by for community organisations’, and this scarcity may partly explain the competition among Somali community organisations. However, it is not only competition for funding that explains the divergences among Somali community organisations. Underlying the rhetoric of much of the Somali community discourses is the inclination for positive self-appraisal, whereby each organisation positions itself beyond the kinship-based divide within an ever expanding landscape of Somali community organisations, by proclaiming itself as the only one with an open door policy. Within this positive self-appraisal there is an emphasis on ‘our’ organisation, which signifies how involved community workers portray their respective organisations in a positive light and their counterparts in a negative one, consequently shifting the blame of non-cooperation to the ‘uncooperative other’. However, ironically, even if community organisations maintained an open door policy, service users would remain suspicious of the genuineness of the service provider, wondering, as one youth worker puts it, whether ‘the services delivered to them is a hundred per cent service’ (Nouh, youth worker), because:

When it comes to tribes it is in our blood whether we work for a community [or not]. I think with every Somali it is inside their blood stream, you know ... It is like there [are two] Somali restaurant[s] not far from here. One is owned by one tribe and the other by another tribe. Certain tribes would go to this one, and certain tribes would go to that one, which is kind of ridiculous to understand because for me I would choose [the one] who provides the best food, you know, and the hygiene. (Shamsa, community worker)

Shamsa draws on an example of restaurant customers to explain that the same logic underlies how service users seek assistance from voluntary organisations. With her remark 'tribalism' is 'inside their blood stream', she questions the taken-for-grantedness of the role of the notion of clan in mediating interpersonal relations, including business relations. Fangen (2007b) makes a similar observation of burgeoning 'interest and welfare organisations' in Norway and a lack of cohesive community representation. Therefore, although the clan logic often underpins most social and interpersonal relationships, the idea of 'clan' and its role in social relationships is merely explained away as a 'genealogical curse' (i.e. there is nothing one can do about clan identities), and consequently explanations for the lack of the 'sought-after community' are couched in materialistic terms, i.e. competition for charity funding. According to Lewis (1998: 101), the social organisation of Somalis is based on a segmented lineage system within which 'clan' as the organising principle plays a crucial role in the emergence of collectivities within the Somali community. As nomads, Somalis have historically always led a life of individual autonomy with shifting loyalty and temporary inter-clan alliances. In their study, Fuglerud and Engebriksen (2006) contrast the historic nomadic way of life of the Somalis with that of the Tamils who, unlike them, had sedentary forms of life in the home country and a history of a centralised social system.

Polarised community relations are undermined further by the jostling for recognition among the many community organisations, all competing to legitimise their position within the wider Somali community. This competition is compounded by non-cooperation and thus lack of bonding social capital (Portes, 1998) is shifted to the 'other' organisations. Consequently, it would appear that the Somali community is trapped in unproductive forms of relationship, which makes it difficult for community organisations to represent their collective interest so as to counteract the common threats they face in the host country. So given the lack of 'shared experiences', which Apple (2000: 151) argues form the corner stone of a 'community', one can suggest that the idea

of community merely signifies a representation of the categorisations for recognition prevalent in the host society. Many of the respondents agree that such a lack of shared experience in the context of their departure from their native country has damaged the formation of trusting and harmonious community relationships. Such a situation impedes the collective socialisation of the young people of this community and is certainly not conducive with the enhancement of their life-chances or the social mobility of the community as a whole. There is a general consensus that Somali young people lack role models.

I think Somali young people are in difficult situations because of lack of career, the situation back home, no parental guidance, or advice from other senior members of the community. Mustafa, community worker

One way of understanding of the ways in which Somali young people engage with the opportunity structures of the host society and plan their futures would therefore involve exploring the nature and quality of their social relations and the extent to which they are socialised within their community networks. These concerns offer motives for concerned community leaders to fill the gap, because, as one respondent has noted, young people's aspirations are mediated by their interaction with their community. As Hussein (a tutor/community worker) notes, the sense of belonging to a community is among the factors that shape young people's career identities. He states that young people might be motivated by the desire to contribute to their community by pursuing careers that are lacking: 'You might say "I want to train to be a teacher, because there are no Somali teachers"'. Understanding the logic of the Somali community organisations against this background is important for making sense of the lack of community cooperation. Two key sources of influence can be distinguished in the emergence and growth of community organisations. The first relates to the opportunities offered by the UK multicultural policy context that shape the struggle for recognition and for social equality. As Zetter et al. (2005) argue, refugee community organisations have been widely regarded 'as prime movers in fostering integration' within the discourse of multiculturalism. Second, community organisations are often set up by concerned members of the community to reconstruct their pre-immigration practices in the host society in an attempt to preserve cultural and religious heritage, which they perceive to be under threat of being assimilated into the host culture. However, ironically, the drive to come together in a cohesive social relationship mediated (perhaps even encouraged)

by favourable multicultural policy subsidies in the face of the centrifugal forces that haunt the Somali community.

During the period of data collection in early 2011, I attended a workshop co-organised by one of the community leaders participating in this research. There was a debate among the community leaders, particularly among the Somaliland ones, on how they officially would want to register themselves in the UK national census. In preparation for how to register, this debate was mainly about ethnicity and national identity. Some were suggesting that 'Somalis' from Somaliland should register themselves as 'Somalilanders', while others were either indifferent to the debate or wanted to register as 'Somalis'. One community leader suggested that regardless of country of origin (Somaliland or Somalia), those in the UK should all register themselves as 'Somalis'. This particular community leader's views represented those who felt that Somalis in the UK, regardless of their regional and ethnic origin, face a common threat. In his view, if ethnic minority communities 'reach a threshold of 50,000 they receive special status'. He argued that in the previous census Somalis were estimated at around 43,000, and he raised concerns that registering as 'Somalilanders' (regardless of the fact that ten years later since 2001, the number of this young community would increase anyway) would split the number for the Somali community as a whole and thus weaken the struggle for recognition. Another community leader felt that identity and ethnicity are very much political and that they had a moral responsibility towards their country to reinforce their distinct identity as Somalilanders.

Consequently, it is argued that the idea of community in its 'imagined' construct (Blackshaw, 2010) for making sense of social segmentation shapes both interpersonal and community relations, that is, relations among members of different community groups within the Somali community. So, in the absence of an encompassing sense of community cohesion that is geographically bounded, members of this diaspora community have enacted clan affiliations for establishing a densely networked structure of relations that is transnational. Moreover, these complex community relations, which indeed reflect the pre-migration social practices, in turn, contribute to the positioning of the Somali community within the wider multicultural discourses in the host society. Commenting on this aspect, one community worker notes that:

What people know are stereotypes and negative things about Somalia. One gets the image of the war, you have the Black Hawk Down, the famine, and now the

sea pirates. They would ask you ‘are you part of them?’ ... No question about it.
(Houssein, tutor/community worker)

According to Houssein, such stereotypes have implications for the construction of identity among young people in that ‘[n]o one wants a lawless stereotype’ (Houssein). For him, because of this negative stereotyping, young people struggle to be associated with a community and are ‘[j]ust walking in the shadows, not knowing who [they] are, or where [they] come from’. The question now is: what are the implications of the lack of effective intra-community relations for Somali youth? In addressing this question I suggest that the absence of what Portes (1998) calls ‘bonding social capital’ affects the ways in which these youth discursively position themselves in the wider context of the host society and the inter-generational relationship with their parent generation who continue to maintain links with the home country. For, community, as a resource of social capital, is closely associated with the educational achievement and social mobility of young people (Coleman, 1988). Within the Somali context, the concept of ‘community’ is more likely to be a symbolic representation of a group of people sharing commonalities. However, the instrumental utility of identification with the community and enacting one’s belonging to it, or its normative connotations (‘it is good to be part of a community’) appear to have become problematic. Evidence from this research shows that such an altruistic vision is difficult for the Somali community to achieve, because of the two pre-migration narratives of civil war and segmented social organisation discussed earlier, which both have rendered this community socially polarised and divided into ‘sub-community clusters’ (Hammond, 2013: 7). Thus one can suggest that the sense of ‘community’ is strongly more defined by ‘invisible’ clan affiliations than by shared and historical associations.

4.5 Conclusion

A key aim of this chapter has been to describe the Somali community context within which Somali young people construct their choice biographies. A key theme emerging from the data analysis is that the Somali community’s orientation towards its resettlement in the UK is changing from a temporary sojourn to one of more permanent residency. This shift is mediated by the coming-of-age children in the diaspora who are putting down roots in the host society and with their maturation are assuming greater responsibility for their futures. It has been suggested that the young are increasingly becoming change agents in their parents’ orientation and attitude towards the adopted country. Intergenerational influences are mutual in that perceptions of the parent

generation become shaped by its maturing children in much the same way as parents shape their children's choices. These mutual influences embody role reversal, that is, young adults effectively take on parental roles, because of their linguistic advantage and familiarity with the subtleties of the host culture.

A second theme emerging from the interviews is that the 'Somali' cultural and share identity has become contested, whereby beneath the putative homogeneity there exists much division in which clan affiliation as an organising framework continues to characterise much of the relations among members of this community. Another major theme emerging from the accounts of the community workers is the inability to bridge this community divide. It is in this context that community organisations shape the intergenerational transference of guidance, attitudes and orientations. Community activists express concerns about the collective fate of the young people in the UK and their views are largely presented in 'normative discourses' (Gibbard, 1986) not only in the sense that it is their collective responsibility to ensure the continuity of cultural identity, and that the young should maximise the opportunities available, but also in the sense that both of these actions are required for maintaining the collective standing of the community in the host society. Some work is already being undertaken to reconstruct the social life routines taken over from the home country, but the community leaders who participated in this research show frustration with their inability to build trust among the community sub-groups, and this difficulty of establishing trust relations has been explained as being due to the polarisation of community relations. These problematics have implications for the formation of a Somali identity and intergenerational relations. This theme of 'identity' will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: The Construction of Diasporic Identity

5.1 Introduction

Like their counterparts from other ethnic minority or immigrant communities, Somali young people in the UK are faced with difficult questions pertaining to their identity and belonging. In this chapter, I discuss the processes underlying British-Somali young people's construction of diaspora identity. A core aspect in this process is the fact that, as will be argued, the majority of these young people *diasporise* their identities, that is, they actively emphasise the permanency of their sojourn in the diaspora. The discussion of this phenomenon focuses on two dimensions of identity formation: identity as constructed through intersubjective social processes and identity as a self-realisation project. Focusing on the mediating role of social relationships, translational links and the level of incorporation into the host society, I differentiate three overlapping manifestations of this new diaspora identity: circumstantial, Muslim and multicultural. I have described these three modes of self-identification as the *diasporisation* of identity, which is a process of belonging to an adopted country while maintaining transnational links with another 'imagined' home country. The different categories represent different degrees of this diaspora identity. I also argue that these different ways of searching for meaning and belonging are strategies that young people develop to deal with the continuity/discontinuity dilemmas they face in their daily lives. Moreover, I argue that identity construction is both space- and time-related in that the majority of the young people in this research have experienced multiple moves, and in that process have assumed different identities reflecting their migration trajectories. Further, socialisation processes, transmigration and the multicultural setting into which the diaspora young people are born or raised form the context in which identity is constructed in both its cultural and linguistic dimensions. Identity construction is also time-related in that it is a relational concept, which is a reflection of subjectivity; time-bound in the sense that it potentially changes with maturation.

5.2 Circumstantial identity

In the previous chapter, I distinguished two processes that characterise the emergence of the Somali community in the diaspora: continuity and change. I discuss the latter in the fourth section of this chapter. Continuity is a strategy of managing *diasporised* identity, which in some respects entails resistance to change. For, the mere fact of their presence in a multicultural society is sufficient for some young people to articulate and enact their

distinctiveness so that they remain a recognisable part of the larger multicultural setting. In many respects circumstantial identity represents resistance to the threats of change young people (as part of the emerging Somali immigrant community) face in their daily lives. It involves racial awareness that is not subsumed under the hegemonic values of multiculturalism. Adherence to one's own cultural identities and hence, the identity hyphenation of diaspora-Somalis is regarded as merely circumstantial. That is, while they acknowledge this hyphenation, they do not see the geographical displacement experienced by their parent-generation as entailing a displacement of cultural identities. The 'circumstantial' identity involves both an articulation of this displaced heritage in the host society and an act of resistance to the *pathologising* practices (Archer, 2008) inherent in the hegemonic values of the dominant host culture. With this type of identity, young people consider their presence in the UK as temporary and 'circumstantial', that is, they have developed a form of a 'diaspora identity', whereby they refer to their presence in the diaspora merely in terms of the circumstances around their forced migration. Consequently, the narratives of displacement keep emotional links with the 'cultural homeland' (Bolognani, 2007) very much alive. This is evident in the following quote:

I am a British citizen but I will say I am a Somalian ... Actually, I am Somalian first then British citizen. (Youssuf, 16, A-level student, male)

One of the recurrent themes in young people's accounts revolves around the fact that despite the shift towards a more permanent residency in the diaspora, where young people play a pivotal role, some still retain a strong sense of pride in their Somaliness: 'I was born in Britain, but I am a Somalian' (Haroun, 17, A-level student, male). Circumstantial identity captures this process of foregrounding cultural identity over its hyphenation (i.e. Diaspora-Somali; British-Somali; Dutch-Somali; etc.) and this form of identity is born out of a mixture of cultural heritage, ethnicity and place of birth on the one hand and threats of discontinuities on the other. According to Fangen (2007b), although the degree of attachment to their cultural identity varies, most Somali young people tend to define themselves essentially as Somalis and regard their identity as given and indisputable. Nonetheless, a 'different kind of Somali' (Engebrigtsen, 2011: 304) identity is emerging. For as Modood (2007: 101-102) argues, 'the assertion of identities depends upon circumstances, including the presence of other groupings, but cannot be reduced to such'. That is to say, the *diasporising* strategy involves performance of a

‘balancing act’ (Warikoo, 2011) in the process of incorporation into the dominant culture. Two processes can be differentiated that underlie this balancing act, i.e. the maintenance and reconstruction of cultural identity in the diaspora: family processes and *othering* processes. Emotional links with the country of descent are maintained through ‘family influences’ manifested in an outright rejection of the host culture identity. Omar explains this as follows:

There is one thing my dad doesn’t like. I said to my dad one day that I got a British passport, that means I am British. He got mad, he said ‘you’re not British, you’ll always be a Somalian’. After I said ‘that is how I am, I can’t change who I am no matter’. (Omar, 14, GCSE student, male)

The way second-generation young people engage with the opportunities in the host society partly depends on the nature of their social relations within their community networks. That is, contact with one’s own community forms the basis through which engagement with the opportunity structure is mediated. Following Coleman (1988), I suggest that in cases where links with one’s own network is strong, self-esteem and identity follow suit and the young person is more likely to become more agential in the way he or she engages with the opportunity structures. The development of attitudes and expectations embedded in migration biographies is intricately linked to the question of ‘identity’, which for some young people gives rise to the emerging pro-education *habitus*, which I discuss in Chapter 6. Identity can be used as a resource by marginalised groups, because it has an objective bearing on young people’s life-chances in that it informs the ways in which they construct their aspirations. In the case of Omar, maintaining emotional links with the originating country reinforces the idea of appreciating chances in the host country, which is mediated through family narratives. Omar enjoys strong links with a three-generation family. He has a grandmother involved in forming his Somali identity; an uncle in forging his ‘learner identity’; and parents socialising him into expectations that he has adopted: ‘My mum told me when I grow up [to] make money and help the family’. The involvement of the extended family members in guiding him has not only mediated his learner identity, but has also shaped his self-identification:

I have my grandma telling me about [the history of Somaliland], because she lived through the war and she suffered, like her son died in the war. She told me

about how it [the war] started. That is one thing that got me motivated about history. Then I was like ‘OK, if I know that about my country, I should learn something about this country [UK]’. (Omar, 14, GCSE student, male)

Despite the fact that Omar has known no other country than the UK, he still considers his stay in the UK as temporary and ‘circumstantial’, that is, he has developed a form of diaspora identity that makes him perceive his presence here as merely due to the circumstances of forced migration. So not only the myth to return, but also the wish to return in order to contribute to developments in the country of descent, serve as major drivers in the construction of some learner identities.

If you look [at] Africa today it is a Third World [continent] and one of my aims is like, if I can, to prevent diseases in my country and make poverty history. And like I’ve been there three times and like it’s annoying when you see old people sick on the streets. If you compare to this country you see the NHS [National Health Service] is a free health service, but in Somaliland you have to pay loads of money just to get like a little treatment. So if I open like free health service like [the] NHS over there, life would be much better and people would be much more healthier and would not be dying at such a young age. (Omar, 14, GCSE student, male)

In his account, Omar explains how visiting Somaliland reinforced his career aspirations. I discuss how such ‘immigrant optimism’ shapes young people’s aspiration in Chapter 6, but for the purpose at hand it is sufficient to say that the involvement of the extended family members in guiding him has not only mediated his learner identity, but has also shaped his self-identification as more of a Somalilander than British. In this regard, he is considering his stay in the UK as an opportunity to get educated, anticipating a return to Somaliland, which he calls ‘home’. For Omar, ‘my country’ expresses the significance he attaches to the country of his parents. The ideas about ‘home country’ being his parents’ native country and the UK as ‘a country of opportunities’, imparted to him through family relations, mediate his views towards his presence in the UK, including those towards education and identity.

Family settings are spaces for constant battles over negotiating a self-identity; in family settings children inter-subjectively construct their identity through experimentation and

seeking parental approval as well as incurring parental disapproval, as is the case with Omar's self-identification of 'Britishness'. It is through the avoidance of such parental 'getting mad' that a sense of unshakeable authentic and transnational identity rooted in ethnic origin is created that cannot be changed by mere dislocation. Quite often family influences are sufficient for transmitting and instilling such self-identification, for families sometimes take strong measures in shaping their children's ethnic identity, as shown in the following quote:

I was born in Norway. I don't remember much of my childhood. My Mum decided that we move to Dubai for religious purposes because she was concerned we would go astray and become atheists or Christians. She wanted to give us the Muslim faith. So we moved to Dubai. (Aisha, 20, gap year student, female)

The above quotes illustrate the significance of family processes in the formation of identity. I discuss how identity is defined in religious terms in the next section, but for the purpose at hand I focus on the cultural/ethnic dimensions of identity and the role of significant others in that process. Although Aisha states that she recalls her mother's concerns about her children's cultural upbringing and how she decided to relocate the children to a Muslim country, she also recalls her own struggle about her 'hyphenated' diaspora identity of 'Black-Norwegian':

[M]y teachers used to feed me with the idea that I [was] a Black-Norwegian, because of the fact that I was born in Norway. So I used to think of myself as a Norwegian child. I was Norwegian outside and I was Somali inside my house. I had two different identities. (Aisha, 20, gap year student, female)

Aisha's narrative shows not only the role of family processes, but also the profound implications space and time have for the construction of identity. In her statement 'Now I can firmly say I am Somalian', she reflects on the development of her identity over time; as a result of changing the locality where she grew up and moving to Dubai, she 'started to identify herself as Muslim'. Aisha's experiences are relatively unusual in that unlike the majority of the diaspora-born/raised who either have no experience of living in their country of descent or go there on holiday, she has multiple transnational experiences of living in the originating cultural and religious context, i.e. she lived in

Dubai and in Somaliland, according to her account, for the sole purpose of solidifying her Muslim and ethnic identity.

A similar family influence appears from Amina's account, for as she notes: 'I did not need other Somalis around me to reinforce my identity'. In her statement 'it was given from my household', she emphasises the role of family in the construction of her cultural and ethnic Somali identity. Family processes shape not only the construction of identity, but also the development of self-esteem, which is crucial for Somali young people when dealing with the challenges that they are confronted with, as the following quote exemplifies:

I see myself as one of the top people like ... I am from a good culture. Before when there was peace, Somalia used to be good and used to be known. Now as there is no peace back home people think of us as refugees and all that. They say we don't have a home, our home is destroyed and everything, but we don't care. All we know is that one day Somalia is gonna get peace and we will go back there. (Geuddi, 16, A-level student, male).

Pride in origin is important for self-realisation. As Giddens (1991: 66) argues, self-esteem feeds into 'ontological security', which is essential for the development of self-confidence. Drawing on the myth of a discourse of return (Anwar, 1979), Geuddi finds this belonging in his imagined home country. Stable identity, in part, shapes self-positioning in the context of the immediate social milieu – one that comprises barriers, opportunities, and where one derives a sense of pride, security, belongingness and 'strategic self-positioning in relation to others' (Gewirtz and Cribb, 2009: 138).

I see myself as the Somali more than anything else to be honest with you. Yes I love Britain. Britain gave me great opportunity to make something of my life, and I do have gratefulness and am respectful for the opportunities given to me here in the UK, but I still see myself as Somali first and foremost, but, you know, at the same time equally I'm not ashamed to say I'm British either. So I see myself as Somali, and culturally, that's interesting, culturally I do what most young people would probably do in the UK. You know like socialise with friends, go to the cinema, you know just have a laugh with the boys. (Abdirahman, 25, youth worker, male)

What is distinctive about the Somali identity is that more often than not young people's self-identification is not mediated by 'collective consciousness', but rather by the

phenotypical appearances in the sense that ‘I am obviously a Somalian’. They consider their identity and belongingness in relation to their families and individual spheres, but not in relation to community membership. Indeed, for most young people it is individual well-being that is a priority, while for community workers the concern is collective survival. For the community leaders, in the words of Qamar, a community worker, Somali young people are ‘obviously ... losing some sort of identity’. This created imperatives for the first generation Somalis and for community leaders to raise cultural awareness among the younger generation. It is felt that such intergenerational differences around the centrality of identity further shape the Somali community’s sense of collectivity. In a way, the processes underlying the construction of an overarching national identity reflect the crises in relations discussed in the previous chapter. Moreover, embeddedness within one’s own community network facilitates the nurturing of certain distinct cultural traits, i.e. language, beliefs and value systems, which are crucial for the development of personal identity and self-positioning within the wider society.

In addition to community membership, a second source for the construction of circumstantial identity is a critical awareness of ‘race’ relations. One way of developing an awareness of racially defined identity in a multicultural setting is through peer relationships. Drawing on her own experiences, one community worker notes:

I am actually thinking of myself ... because I remember when I was at school and every summer holiday you know we will have my friends saying ‘Oh she is going back home’. I used to wish I had a home to go to because there is no way I’d stay here for six weeks. I would have loved to go back every holiday back home. (Shamsa, community worker)

However, quite often awareness of ‘race’ relations is shaped by schooling experiences, either through teacher expectations (the example of Aisha discussed above) or through reflective engagement with the school curriculum, as is the case with Sahra and Amina (see below). With this critical awareness, some young people, like Amina, have experienced alienation in school settings. Her daily routine was a struggle between the cultural and linguistic discontinuities of her background, on the one hand, and the alienating mechanisms of dominant ‘*othering*’ discourses, on the other. Without being acutely aware of her racial background and ‘*otherness*’, she remembers how well her

family was integrated into Dutch society, where she lived from the age of three until she had completed her secondary education. The Dutch language was her first language, in the formal sense; English her second, and at home 'it was insisted that [she] spoke Somali'. Speaking Somali was a strong reminder of her ethnic origin and more importantly a tool used by her parents to transmit cultural practices which, according to her account, in turn informed her life strategies. In her case, her parents' insistence on her and her siblings speaking Somali at home shaped her views regarding ethnic origin. However, she remembers that the daily routine of her family life resembled that of her neighbours: she went to ballet classes, and her brothers to Saturday football clubs. 'For many years', she recalls, 'we led a very sheltered life, not knowing we were different'. In addition to the family processes, a similarly salient process emanating from the nature of the school curriculum moulded her early aspirations and her awareness of '*otherness*'. Amina's experience of being the only black child in a private school where she questioned the nature of the taught curriculum underpinned her awareness of 'race' relations at an early age. While dominant institutions discursively position them as 'others', young people are not passive recipients of contextual influences. For they subjectively construct their identities through negotiation or rejection of assigned identities and, depending on time and space, assume different situational identities.

It has emerged that maintaining links with community culture, either directly or through family links or with the country of descent, fosters the development of a transnational identity. Those with a strong sense of such identity tend to think beyond geographical limitations in forming their aspirations; they thus show a keen interest in developments in the 'home country' of their parents, regardless of the *practical* connection with this country. Their connection to their 'home country' is an *emotional* one. Some of the young people in this category are diaspora-born/raised who have experienced *othering* discourses, but most of those who maintain emotional links with the 'home country' are new arrivals (young immigrants who spent their formative years in the country of descent). Such emotional attachment is manifested in their attitude towards education, which is expressed in terms of 'my country needs me', in conformity with familial expectations. I would suggest that it is here that the explanatory relevance of the concept of ethnicity as a form of social capital mediates orientation towards opportunity structures and identity construction.

5.3 Resorting to faith for belonging

As discussed in Chapter 4, the Somali national ‘identity’ has been weakened by the civil war and political crises in that country, to the extent that even *Somaliness* has now become contested. To fill up this national identity vacuum, the way in which Somali young people in the diaspora construe their identity results from contextual influences within the current racialised, gendered and classed discourses in the new host country. While they might be searching for somewhere to belong to, the reviewed literature shows that they are readily allocated a new racialised identity – as part of the black community. Moreover, Islam has become for some young people the overriding marker of identity. In some respects this, as an organising concept, has taken precedence among the Somali diaspora over their ethnic identity in that it has survived social fragmentation and ensuing crises in Somali community relations.

A number of mosques are also opening up solely run by Somalis. We have one in Haringey, there is one in Tower Hamlets, there is one now opening up in Southall. I think there are about four or five mosques run by Somalis. Previously we used to go to mosques run by Asians particularly by the Pakistani community. (Mustafa, community worker)

The establishment of religious centres serves multiple purposes. It signifies the urgency to find a sense of community consciousness; it functions as a strategy for managing changes and preserving cultural values; and acts as a landmark emphasising permanent establishment in the host society. Mosques as expressions of Muslim identity are sites for fostering a sense of belonging far beyond the boundaries of national, racial, ethnic and clan identities. For community leaders, Somali young people are at risk of losing their cultural heritage and ethnic identity, or even ‘shy away to be called Somali or identify themselves’ (Houssein, tutor/community worker). At the individual level, the articulation of Muslim identity is achieved through distinct Islamic dress codes and through discursive self-positioning. For example, Choukri emphasises her Muslim identity as a key signifier of her daily life, more important than her ethnic or national identity:

I would firstly identify myself as a Muslim. Obviously I am a Somali person or whatever, but I see my identity more with the Muslim community rather than just Somalis. (Choukri, 23, PCGE student, female)

In the face of discontinuities in everyday life, Choukri's ethnic identity is replaced by her faith-based one. However, while their Muslim identity is unquestionably part of their Somali identity, the young people differ markedly in relation to how they construct and enact their Muslim identity. For Sahra, her reconstruction of her Muslim identity is a response to a tacit process of alienation cast in a 'positive language of support' that she has experienced at school. She reports that during her secondary schooling days a project aiming to raise ethnic minority achievement, specifically for Somali students, was launched in her school, which reinforced her 'ethnic minority status'. Although she is quite firm about her ethnic identity, 'Definitely a Somalian', she still struggles with both her self-identification and geographical attachment in the here-and-now:

At times I feel like, I would not say a refugee, but not far away from it, because I do feel there is some part of me that is actually there. I happen to be here because of circumstances. My heart is there. I only visited three times and the longest time I have there was for about two months in 2007, but that is for me where I call back home. That is where I belong. (Sahra, 25, social worker, female)

Sahra's longing for a belonging involves a de-diasporising dimension articulated in 'my heart is there [country of descent]', which evokes to a certain degree the myth to return, common among first generation immigrants. Muslim identity in this context functions for young people like Sahra as a strategy for managing '*absent presence*' in the here-and-now, which is the 'de-territorialisation' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988) of belonging, involving an emotional investment in an imaginary country. It is within this context that Sahra tries to find her sense of belonging in her Muslim identity. Her religious identity is much intertwined with her professional identity and although she emphasises divine predestination, that is, talking in terms of God's will, she also shows agency in making conscious choices. Modood (2007: 117) argues that agency cannot always be understood 'in objective terms without reference to cultural norms'. With some female respondents religious identity is visibly clear from their Islamic dress, and they seem to negotiate this identity within their everyday life. In Sahra's case, she regards her faith as a source of her strength and talking about it she states: 'My faith influences me a lot. Without it I would have been a different character'.

Clearly, the ways in which young people construct their identities is shaped by social relations, which by their very nature are intertwined with power relations that are in the main arranged along class, 'racial' groups and gender divisions. Describing her presence in the UK as 'circumstantial' and locating her belonging in her parents' native country, Sahra reveals in her narrative how her '*othered*' racial status is co-constructed out of an interaction between *othering* practices from dominant social institutions and her responses to these. She comments:

At the time when I got my A-Level results, the BBC came into our secondary school. They came into a few and they came to this one because everybody was sort of ... they were quite astounded by this ethnic majority school that was getting good grades, you know, and they were like 'let's go and talk to them,' uhm [smiling], 'these creatures!' (Sahra, 25, social worker, female)

In this quote, Sahra's perception of her school as an 'ethnic majority school', and her feeling that her school's achievements attracted media interest simply because of its 'ethnic majority status', illustrate the fact that she was 'critically conscious' (Frymer, 2006: 104) of her position. She responded to this, with an attitude of: 'let's talk to them' and being seen as a 'subject' by discursively shrugging it off with her comment: 'These creatures!' Despite shrugging it off initially, such experiences had nonetheless a profound influence on her subjective sense of belonging. For instance, a striking observation in her comments is about 'the media interest in ethnic minority children getting good grades'. This is salient because quite often the performance of children from ethnic minority groups is understood in terms of 'underachievement', portraying minority ethnic youth as non-engaging and lacking in appropriate dispositions, i.e. those required for constructive engagement with the schooling process.

Archer (2008), in her study of Chinese young people in the UK, found that *othering* discourses with their *racialised* overtones are not only limited to minority ethnic youth underachievement relative to white peers, but that also over-achievement is presented as undesirable. Archer (2008: 91) argues that their achievement is *pathologised*; Chinese young people are represented as victims of an oppressive culture which values 'passivity' and 'hard work'. In a similar vein, optimism and aspirations of young people from immigrant backgrounds are represented as 'unrealistic' (more on this in the next chapter). Moreover, the deployment of the Muslim identity offers a counter-discourse to

the hegemonic integrationist connotations of multiculturalism. However, for some young people Muslim identity is not necessarily a response to *othering* discourses, but a natural part of their selfhood. 'I see myself as a Muslim, I see myself firstly as Muslim but I see myself as a British-Somalian' (Haroun). For others, like Geuddi, Muslim identity is an essential part of what parents impart to their children: 'cos she trained me since I was young and she thinks of our religion and our education at the same time' (Geuddi, 16, A-level student, male).

Based on their 'race', faith and immigration narratives, Somali young people bear multiple identities: while they reconstruct their Muslim identity, they are equally framed as part of the wider British black community and by drawing on their displacement experiences they remain distinguishable from both the British black community as well as other voluntary immigrants. Moreover, these young people have developed a more context-dependent identity: while outdoors they identify with peers, at home they 'switch' their identity to conform to familial normative expectations. This is illustrated by Haroun:

The way you dress outside and the way you dress to work has to be two different things. The way you speak has to be two different things. The way you act has to be two different things. You have to act in certain amount like two different people. (Haroun, 17, A-level student, male)

Haroun remains conscious of his ethnicity and also of changes in the cultural identity of Somali young people: 'culture makes you like. You are your culture, [and] you are not supposed to change your culture' and at the same time he says 'there is some things that I do myself that are not our culture [Interviewer asked: Like what?], my hair [he has his hair braided], for example, is not our culture [laughs] but I see things that are even, that are a bit worse than what I am doing'. Here Haroun reflectively acknowledges that the 'braided hair' he is sporting is seen as part of the discontinuity, which he justifies as 'managing my hair', yet he is well aware that change is inevitable. What his quote represents is the theme of 'resistance' towards a complete assimilation and loss of authentic national identity. He is negotiating his personal identity at the margin of his cultural heritage within the context of the hegemonic culture, which he seeks to 'fit in' (Forman, 2001) with. Despite experiences of the youth justice system, he is of the opinion that he has never experienced racism and echoing Goffman's 'impression management' he states 'it is all about appearance'. What Haroun's account shows is that

young people are skilful in impression management, as is noted by one community leader:

These children, somehow, have to navigate between the two cultures. When they are with their parents they have to act like a typical Somali, when they are with their peer group they have to conform exactly to what is expected of them. In a way they are doing quite well and I can call them 'fairly bi-cultural'. Parents are not bi-cultural in that sense. Where the child would be able to fit both cultures and can act or behave to a certain degree, not fully, like a Somali when he is within the Somali context, a parent will not have the flexibility. (Hamud, tutor/community worker)

Young people take on multiple identities and since their public behaviour clashes with their private identity, they develop strategies to manage dual and perhaps even multiple identities. Parents, on the other hand, want to retain their cultural identities and want to ensure their children adopt these, and the context in which parents want to impart these traits does not facilitate this process. In particular, there appear to be gender differences in this public/private discontinuity and in the degree of adherence to the Muslim identity. While with the young males dress code is often not as visible as with the young females. Arguably, from an early age they accept their '*otherness*' while young males continue to maintain their Somali-Muslim identity cast in a multicultural expression. That is, it would appear that girls have resolved the 'bi-cultural' identity at an early age, for as Choukri notes:

Yeah, they are more Somali Somalis and they hang around with Somali groups, but when they are probably primary school because obviously they are wearing hijab, they would identify themselves with Asians wearing hijab. They would be in that group. Whereas Somali boys I think they find it harder to identify with anyone. I think they try sometimes to go with black boys and Asian boys, but I think they are always in the middle because black boys may not be Muslim and then they experience, from what have seen anyway, racism from some of the Asian communities. So they tend to just stick to their own. (Choukri, 23, PCGE student, female)

In this quote, Choukri echoes the general discussion among the Somali community that young males are at an increased risk of exclusion. Hamda makes a similar observation:

I see a lot of boys just hanging around, just wasting their time, going to prison, whereas girls, they are more into the religion and education. Erm so it is like, I rather see as a gender than like as a whole. (Hamda, 21, university student, female)

The accounts of some young people show that there is a construction of not only new identities in the diaspora, but also a continuation of the old identity. They constantly and reflectively negotiate the maintenance of their cultural heritage, while embracing the changes to their cultural practices, which is necessary for establishing their lives in their new homeland. Of course, they differ in the way they manage this change/continuity tension and do so with little help from their parents, by developing their own strategies of making sense of their everyday experiences in the host country. Clearly, the young are more adept in reconciling the changes and continuities, while the parent generation often struggles with the cultural mismatches. That is, the former experiment with different strategies of engaging in the world around them with which they are more familiar than their parents. As discussed in Chapter 4, it is here that the young people become catalysts in the change process, which the Somali immigrant family encounters while negotiating a position in the host society.

Themes of religion and culture as organising concepts for making sense of their lives and that of their fellow members run through the accounts of some of the young people. The concept of 'culture' enjoys much currency among social scientists and lay people alike to offer readily available explanations for differences between different ethnic and social groups. However, it appears that cultural and religious identities are often used interchangeably as for some people the distinction between the two is only of theoretical importance. One young person, Badr (23, unemployed, male) questions the idea that culture is important, and instead focuses on the urgency to preserve Islamic values which he perceives are under threat. Talking about the war in Somalia as an example, he says that over the last twenty years many Somalis were killed not by outsiders or invaders, but by their fellow Somalis. According to him, this fact alone makes it hard for anyone to sell Somali cultural values to the diaspora young people. He believes that the

problems the Somali community faces are not necessarily because of the negative influences from the host culture, but more because of the re-enactment of social practices from the country of origin, which leads to a community divide. In his view overcoming this community divide will be an uphill struggle, because Somali young people are overwhelmed by the contextual influences of the host society.

Badr has been in the UK for five years, but spent his formative years in Saudi Arabia. He seems to be disillusioned with life here and has lost any sense of belonging. He is particularly concerned that the position of the Somali family has been undermined by influences from outside agencies: 'As soon as the child goes to school, the child's behaviour changes because the way children are raised in the UK contravenes our Muslim way of raising children'. Drawing on normative religious repertoires, he is concerned that schooling alienates and *de-Islamises* children in that 'they are taught different sets of institutional values and norms and are encouraged to disclose and report their parents if they are treated different to the way children are supposed to be raised'. Badr goes on to say that 'in Islam respect for parents and for those in authority position is important', and he is concerned that these values are not being transmitted to the children growing up in the UK. His concerns are couched in the language of fear of discontinuity. Paradoxically, this is what, according to Modood (2007: 89), the culturalist dimensions of multiculturalism entail. Modood argues that:

the positing of minority or immigrant cultures, which need to be respected, defended, publicly supported and so on, appeal to the view that cultures are discrete, frozen in time, impervious to external influences, homogenous and without internal dissent. (Modood 2007: 89)

Such essentialist assumptions about culture deny its very nature as an evolving frame of reference that makes provision for the changing context and it is these flexibilities that some young people employ in their daily life situations. However, while for some young people *diasporising* their belonging entails reduction of the 'home country' to its symbolic value, for others like Choukri, the idea of 'country of descent as home country' has even lost that symbolic value. On the question of where do you call home, she responds: 'I don't think it would be the UK and I don't think it would be Somalia either'. Choukri states:

... We've got Universal TV that opened us up to what goes on in Somalia. But at the same time I can't see myself living there. And I don't think 'Oh yeah it feels like me coming home'. And it is the same here as well. I don't feel I belong in this country either. So I would say the only time and place when I was first year of uni *Hajj*, in Mecca. That is the place I would call 'home' even though I was there for only a couple of weeks. It is because I felt really comfortable there. (Choukri, 23, PCGE student, female)

Another definer of the circumstantial identity is the role of social media as is shown by the account of Hamda, who was born in the Netherlands and moved to the UK eight years ago. She identifies herself as 'a Somalilander', which reflects transnational family links and close attachment with her imagined country of descent. Although she has only been twice to Somaliland on holiday, she still regards it as being her home country and has developed a strong national identity:

I do actually talk to my family back home and I communicate with them through the Internet as well seeing pictures all the time. Recently, my mother went there a year ago, I think a couple of years ago, and my cousins as well and they [brought] back a lot of memories, videos and everything. (Hamda, 21, university student, female)

Social media plays an important role in fostering the development of a national/ethnic identity across time and space, for it brings home closer by transcending geographical distance. In many respects, while some young people feel their Muslim identity is mainstreamed in the sense that it is accepted as an essential feature of the multiculturalist society, for others like Choukri and Badr there is a rejection that this is the case. In their case, the Muslim identity connects them to the wider Muslim world, offering them a sense of security, belonging and membership in inclusive faith communities across time and space. Previous research shows similar findings regarding the role of Islam in mediating young people's self-positioning in the diaspora (see Ajrouch and Kusow, 2007; Bigelow, 2008; Collet, 2007; Langellier, 2010). For instance, Bigelow (2008: 3) argues that adherence to Muslim dress represents the maintenance of continuities from the past in the host society. Forman (2001) concludes, as a consequence, that 'a two-tiered Somali community' is likely to emerge. For the majority of Somali young people, despite their phenotypical characteristic which makes them

recognisable as ‘Somalis’ and identifiable by others as such, there is not much else that connects them.

The emergence of a Muslim identity, as shown by some of the Somali young people, can then be understood within this context of the re-enactment of pre-migration narratives. In comparison with an overarching Somali national identity, the Muslim identity is less disputed in bridging relations between *diasporic* Somalis (Valentine, et al., 2009). However, in the aftermath of the July 2007 failed bombing in London (Sporton et al., 2006) and the internationalisation and ‘*Islamisation*’ of the political crises in Somalia, this identity has itself become polarised. This tension associated with the Muslim identity as an organising concept is best illustrated by Modood (2007: 71), who suggests that ‘some Muslims resort to their faith by building an ideology out of their subordination’, that is, they use their faith as a discursive tool for resistance, while others ‘will try to stop looking like Muslims’. In any case, the recent developments of *Islamisation* and the *Islamophobic* responses it solicits lead to a recognition struggle. While certain social groups seek citizenship rights that multiculturalist policies seem to offer, other actors within the multicultural melting pot may be denied the same citizenship rights.

5.4 Joining the multicultural ‘melting pot’

Another strategy young people deploy in their self-identification is incorporation into a hegemonic multicultural identity. The majority of those interviewed discursively position themselves in the wider British multicultural setting, claiming a cosmopolitan/global citizenship. It is only when pressed for further explanation of their life-chances that they reflectively foreground their racialised and ethnically ‘*othered*’ identity and suggest that their educational outcomes are not separable from their ‘*othered*’ ethnic minority status. As one community worker pointed out, young people ‘are aware they would never be accepted’ (Hamud, tutor/community worker) as consciousness of ‘*otherness*’ is dormant and enacted when necessary as a form of ‘ontological security’ (Giddens, 1991). However, the feeling of becoming positioned as an ‘*other*’ in the context of UK ‘race’ relations does not automatically lead to the emergence of ‘ethnicity’ as a resource to counteract stereotyping the *othering* practices encountered in hegemonic social relations. Some young people subscribe to the idea of multiculturalism, where one, regardless of racial, social and racial background, finds an overarching collective identity. That is, they question the idea of a national or ethnic

identity not in the sense that they deny their ethnicity, but in the sense that as much as it is self-evident that they are racially black, Somali and Muslim, they are also multicultural, global and cosmopolitan. The multicultural landscape offers these young people space for negotiating an individuated identity and subscribing to a multicultural identity mediates the change which the Somali community is undergoing. As the following examples show, these young people refer to their cultural identity secondarily, for primarily they discursively position themselves in the hegemonic multicultural context:

I do identify myself as a Somali girl or women, because I think that is the first people notice like when they see you they just see you're a Somali ... but it is just that I'm just not ... I guess because we're living here, this part of [area] London, which is not really a Somali populated area it is nothing like [borough] or like [area in a neighbouring borough]. I'm not really in any Somali circles or groups at all. So it depends on where you live. (Deqa, 21, university student, female)

Deqa's account reveals how second-generation young people negotiate their *diasporic* identity in the new homeland where their parents have come to settle. Similar themes of renegotiation run through the accounts of Kaysar, a 15-year-old GCSE student who states 'my ethnicity is Somalian, but I was born in England. So I'm British and my ethnicity is Somalian. That is how I describe [myself]'. However, while these young people remain conscious of their racially defined identity, it is not pronounced as much as their membership of a global youth identity. Much of the relevance of 'ethnic' identity is reduced to its recognition based on phenotypical appearance, as stated by Deqa: 'that is what the first people notice when they see you'. Acceptance of multicultural values helps young people resolve diaspora dilemmas of displacement and belonging. As is clear from their accounts, there is a trend of constructing a distinct diaspora self-identity, whereby their Somali identity plays merely a secondary role. The process of identity formation among the Somali young people is clearly facilitated by inter-community links where the parent-generation share cultural narratives, foster commonalities and share strategies of managing the children's incorporation into the host country socioeconomically and politically. The polarisation of relations among the Somali community has a bearing not only on the intergenerational transfer of values and norms, but also on the formation of an overarching Somali 'ethnic' or 'national' identity.

Kinship social practices continue to undermine the emergence of shared identity, while the on-going political instability in the country of origin, similarly, continues to work against the emergence of national identity. As a result of these processes, the Somali identity has become contested, taken different connotations and has been problematic by reconfigured regional and kinship identities. That is, in its place a new national identity is emerging, which is fragmented and transnationalised through clan relationships, but devoid of shared meaning or community consciousness. So in terms of identity formation, one can posit that the 'Somali national identity' has become contested in the sense that its deployment as an organising concept has become politicised. That is, its cohesive role for collective interest is contested because it has been hollowed out by the association of some of its aspects (i.e. kinship-based social organisation) owing to the conflict in the country of origin. Fuglerud and Engebrigtsen (2006) and Griffiths (2000) trace identity crises facing Somali youth in the diaspora to the breakdown of the Somali social fabric, which has resulted from the political crises in its country of origin. What is also clear from the accounts is that geographical location shapes biography and belonging as a process of 'establishing citizenship' (Forman, 2001:47). This type of identity is clearly illustrated by Jamal's narrative.

During the recent elections I saw on a form where you could put your ethnicity and there is the category 'Somali'. I don't know why it's done like that. It might be because there is a big the Somali community, I don't know, but I think that the category of just 'African' would be enough. (Jamal, 25, unemployed, male)

In some respects, Jamal's account represents a slow 'normalising process' (Clifford, 1994: 310) of multicultural values, in that he seeks to break with his ethnic identity and make place for this newly formed global diaspora one. Both the continuity and change process that characterise the *diasporic* Somali community operate at the individual level. Jamal's account is an interesting example of this taking on of a *diasporic* identity, which involves negotiating some aspects of his cultural distinctiveness, while retaining others. He holds mixed feelings towards his ethnic identity and culture as key definers of his daily life, for while he rejects ethnic identity as giving 'a wrong impression', his attitude towards cultural values and community membership is far from predictable. On the one hand, his belonging strategy involves subsuming ethnic identity under a hegemonic multicultural one, because in his view, distinctive ethnic identity causes unnecessary feelings of self-othering and unnecessary division among the African community. Such

young people embrace much of the host society's way of life, and their views regarding the home country have changed remarkably. However, Jamal is quite serious that Somalis should be adhering to their cultural roots, where respect for authority and for older people is held in high regard. In other words, he continues to retain some aspects of his cultural values. His views regarding 'respect' for older people and avoiding taking loans with 'interest charges', which is in conflict with his beliefs and values, serve to reinforce the view that he wishes to protect his cultural identity.

Self-positioning within the UK multicultural setting signifies the extent to which the permanency of the second-generation sojourn in the diaspora is becoming a reality. Jamal's self-positioning of 'I would say I'm a Londoner' is not the only example of a 'multiple immigrant'. He has relocated from Germany where he still has some of his family and joined another part of his extended family in the UK. Consequently, there is a discontinuity in his personal identity, but there is continuity in his cultural identity. Changes to ethnic identity echo Beck's (1994) observation that 'the collective and group-specific sources of meaning [or] culture is suffering from exhaustion, break-up and disenchantment (Beck, 1994: 7). What the accounts of Jamal and Khadar (and Haroun discussed earlier) show is that, in Beck's words (1994: 4), 'threats and ambivalences of the biography traditionally dealt within family settings are now increasingly perceived, interpreted and handled by individuals themselves'. Part of this emerging individuated biography is negotiated in the absence of an encompassing Somali national identity, although young people still long for a sense of membership and belonging, which multiculturalism offers them. That is, they subscribe to the multicultural ethos because it offers them space for forging distinct selfhood within group membership. In other words, multiculturalism embodies possibilities for claiming an individuated identity with no clear class or 'race' boundaries. As one community worker notes:

Young people more or less identify themselves within the main youth sub-culture. Whether they are from Somalia or Somaliland, there is a unique value that all youth share. Obviously also the Britishness element is there. Somalis born in this country see themselves as British-Somalilanders or British-Somalis more than anything else. So in that respect there will always be a clash between expectations of the elders who want to see their children as more

Somalilanders than British, or more Somalians than British. (Mustafa, community worker)

Identity as a self-realisation project is increasingly becoming a conceptual tool for self-positioning - a self-positioning that transcends social and geographical boundaries. The construction of cosmopolitan identity is, in part, related to this self-realisation, which is not 'mono-ethnic', but hyphenated as in 'British-Somalilanders' or 'British-Somalis'. In the absence of social cohesion among the Somali community described in the previous chapter, there is among the Somali young people born or raised in the diaspora room to negotiate differentiated identities in the host country where their parents have come to settle. However, despite the loose intra-community relations, there is also pressure among the parent-generation to preserve the cultural identity of the children. Young people have to find ways of negotiating these two processes: incorporation into the mainstream multicultural forms of self-identification, on the one hand, and the maintenance of native cultural identity on the other. Some young females, like Basra and Deqa, appear to have a distinct ethnic minority or Muslim look, a look which they regard to have become mainstreamed into the multicultural 'melting pot'. This theme of embracing multicultural identity is captured by Deqa:

I guess here [UK] because I've been to Somalia [...] when I was twelve. I stayed there for two months. I was born here. I guess here is my homeland. I'm gonna be honest. A lot people will say 'Somalia'. Obviously at the end of the day I'm here and I've lived here all my life. (Deqa, 21, university student, female)

Khadar adds:

Home for me is Amsterdam ... I may have left it when I was only six, but I have formed fond memory of that place. Like I can still recall things from when I was three years old ... I was describing it to my Mum the other day, wall to wall, what it [looked] like. She was shocked that I could remember that. Even when I went back in 2010 it was just like a rush of emotions ... but at the same time I can't say London is not my home, cos I know this place inside out. I've lived here for more than 15 years now. So at the same time I would consider this home. (Khadar, a 22-year-old university gap year student)

Khadar's account shows how diaspora-born young people struggle with the issue of geographical belonging: 'if I am honest I would like to someday be able to call Hargeisa [Somaliland] home,' but, like Deqa in the above account he 'couldn't adapt and the fact I've lived in Europe for so long doesn't help'. As is clear from the accounts above, some young Somalis have addressed the dilemma of belonging by drawing on their familiarity with the here-and-now. Although they regard themselves as British-Somalis, they emphasise their Somali ethnicity, and their British-Somali identity as acquired. The attraction of multicultural identity entails its accommodating connotations of belonging which cuts across social and racial boundaries. It is in the context of such pretensions to racial equality implied in multiculturalism that young people like Khadar take it for granted that they will automatically not only 'fit in' to the hegemonic society (Forman, 2001), but also will have their life-chances judged on a merit basis. For example, as noted above, despite experiences of the youth justice system, Haroun is of the opinion that he has never experienced racism and that it all comes down to one's 'appearance', but he is conscious of his ethnicity. For him 'making it in the UK' is all about appearance. On the issue of whether 'racial' or faith background affects life-chances, most of the young people, particularly those with no experience of the labour market, feel confident about the fairness of the British multicultural system. Another young person notes:

It is probably the way you work. It is not whether you're a Somalian, African or Indian. It's just the way you work. (Nasir, 15, GCSE student, male)

Like Haroun, Nasir is of the opinion that his acceptance of hegemonic values is reciprocated with equal fairness in the sense that his outcomes and membership are purely subject to his 'dialogical relations with others' (Taylor, 1994: 34). According to community worker Hamud, young people remain conscious of the contradictions of multicultural currents and boundaries as well as the limitations of multiculturalism. When pressed, young people acknowledge not only that 'there is a lot of racism', but also that:

They will not be accepted as such as British... If you talk to a Somali, and ask 'what is your identity?', hardly anyone would dare to say he is British. The majority will straightaway tell you 'I'm Somali... They are proud to be Somali. But their 'Somali' is unique to them, not the Somali that kind of encompass all

that ‘Somali’ stands for. So they kind of develop their own unique identity.
(Hamud, tutor/community worker)

Suad is convinced that her ethnic background ‘*shall* not be a problem’ (original emphasis in intonation) in realising her ambitions. Such positive attitudes towards the fairness of the British multicultural system shape ‘learner identities’ based on a positive attitude towards the education process (more on this is in Chapters 6 and 7). While discursive self-positioning in the host country is an articulation of the tendency towards permanent settlement, upon reflection, some young people admit that their life-chances are racialised. As Ayan notes:

Sometimes it depends. If you’re English, yeah, I think it is more easier for them to be what they wanna be. I don’t know why, but if you are [a] Somalian and you wanna be something, I think somehow there is something that is gonna get in your way [Interview asks: ‘Like?’] but I don’t know what it is. I just think the race and where you are from like get in your way. Like people might think: ‘Oh, she is [a] Somalian, why should we accept her and stuff’. But I don’t think it would stop me just because I am [a] Somalian. (Ayan, 14, GCSE student, female)

The acceptance of multicultural values entails being accepted into the immediate multicultural setting: ‘Everyone respects you as a friend’ (Hassan). A similar reflective view towards discrimination is expressed by Aisha who initially says:

[B]ecause this is an area that is so multicultural, they cannot discriminate against you. There are hardly white people here. There is Turkish, there is Jamaican [and] there is a lot of Somalis. You know this place is full of multicultural people. So I don’t think there is any [discrimination]. The colleges here cater for multicultural people. The shops cater for multicultural people. I don’t think there is any discrimination in this particular area. (Aisha, 20, gap year student, female)

However, reflectively Aisha states that although she has not ‘experienced blatant discrimination’, she has experienced subtle manifestations of discrimination couched in the form of advice. Commenting on feedback from the Connexion’s Advisor, she shares:

‘they sort of talk you down’, which she experiences as underestimation of her talents, in that she was informed that she should have considered ‘something like nursing’. Such reflective accounts by Aisha and Ayan regarding their experiences and perceptions of subtle discrimination resonate with the ‘Killing me softly’ song of Roberta Flack (Bonilla-Silva and Embrick, 2006: 30). Young people’s development of awareness of the impact of ‘race’ relations on their belonging and life-chances is often tacit and implicit in their discursive self-positioning. The intricate influences of ‘othering’ discourses are an experience that they can often only (but not always) relate to fully with the benefit of hindsight. Clearly, while consciously seeking to pursue belongingness, young people respond to influences from their social environment. Moreover, the ways in which the identity of minority ethnic youth is talked about in the public domains plays a crucial role in sustaining social inequality. In school settings, for example, the negative stereotyping and lower expectations on the part of teachers, which some minority ethnic youth experience, often lead them to take on a particular learner identity that further alienates them from the schooling process (Modood, 2004; Archer, 2008), this being the case with Amina (see Chapter 6).

Those young people who commented that they had experienced racism most probably have forged their views through lack of experience outside the education domain. Most school-aged young people have the tendency of downplaying experiences of racism as well as misconceiving the possibility of participating in the education process purely in terms of personal effort. It is seldom the case that they recognise prejudices and subtle discrimination as ‘blatant’ as Aisha put it. More on this will be discussed in Chapters 6, but suffice it to say at this point that such downplaying of discrimination experiences is most probably related to the developmental constraints on these young people’s meaning-making, which they express in the form of being in control over their destiny.

Personal identity, in part, facilitates how the individual constructs a self-image relative to their ‘geographical belongingness’ (Fangen, 2007a) and the idea of ‘home country’ is for these young people the place of one’s descent. However, this idea has taken on a new meaning, which encompasses contradictions about identity and belonging in that there is a distinction between the ‘place’ one calls ‘home country’ and the place of residence. For example, for Anisa ‘home’ is where her parents originate from, but on plans to relocate to Somaliland, she responds ‘No, not me, no’:

Because it is different ... We need essentials and stuff. In Somalia like they don't have that much essentials. (Anisa, 23, graduate job seeker, female)

The theme of 'home country' is more complicated than what it simply evokes. For while it evokes stability, security and a static space one calls 'home', it also brings forth a more fundamental notion of adaptation, which young people like Khadar are cognisant of.

I could not adapt. The water, the weather ... Every summer I tend to get nosebleeds no matter what. If it is too hot I get nosebleeds, so the two months I was there it was continuous bleeding. The water was just making me sick. I was throwing up every day. The land was just too dry. (Khadar, 22, university gap year student, male)

Thus, for the young people there is a conceptual separation between an *imaginary* 'home country', and an *actual* 'home country'. This separation appears in Kaysar's account:

Somalia is kind of my home because it is my ethnic land, but I wanna stay in England because I'm used to this country. (Kaysar, 15, GCSE student, male)

Interestingly, young people separate the ideas of 'home country' and 'belonging' from the idea of 'identity'. Such a distinction is explained in terms of continuity/discontinuity discourses (cf. Chapter 4), with the 'wish to return' being one of the basic constitutive elements of immigrant narratives. Previous research on identity formation among Somali young people in the diaspora has shown similar findings of separation between identity and 'geographical belonging' (Fangen, 2007a). Fangen (2007a: 412) points out that 'ethnic identity, everyday practice and geographical belonging do not necessarily converge'.

The theme of 'I still like it here' runs through many of the accounts of the young people. Despite adherence to ethnic Somali identity and presence in the UK being merely circumstantial, their geographical belonging is, for some, global or anchored in the UK. As they mature, young people start searching for their sense of belonging, and their ethnic identity becomes more prominent, with their 'otherness' being emphasised more. As Jenkins (2008: 48) argues that 'identity is always constructed from a point of view

and that collective social identities are located within a territory even if it is an imagined territory'. For the focal young people in this category this 'imaginary territory' is the country of descent with which they associate themselves, even if only in symbolic terms.

Anisa has only been to Somaliland on a holiday visit and has no plans to relocate there, 'because it is different. We need essential and stuff'; she still calls Somaliland her 'home country', purely because it is her parents' native country and hence where she says her origin lies. For her sister, Basra, things are different. She sees her belonging as in the UK, 'because this is the place where I was born and brought up'. She adds: 'when you're used to somewhere and you take someone out of the area they're used to it becomes ... I don't know'. They both state that they barely speak Somali, and both strongly insist that their belonging is in the UK. Like many of the other respondents, their views of 'home country' have merely the significance of being 'where our parents have come from' and they have successfully negotiated their belonging within British multicultural society. The idea of a 'home country' is inextricably linked to the degree of embeddedness within one's own community, transnational links and self-identification. They are happy with their fluid identity of being visibly and culturally Muslim and Somali, but undeniably British. Moreover, a key theme in their accounts is the role of family processes in shaping their self-identification and the fact that community relations play a less significant role. Leading a conservative life-style, they both feel that their visible Muslim identity has been acculturated into the mainstream host society and that they would struggle to 'cope with life in Somalia, because it is so different'. In other words, like many of their peers, they feel they have managed to *diasporise* their identities and belonging.

For the young people who appear to have *diasporised* their belonging, i.e. by accepting and feeling accepted into their appropriated citizenship of the host country, the 'country of descent' has no meaningful impact on their lives in the diaspora. They tend to focus on what is available in the host country. For them, questions of national identity and culture have a different meaning than for those who maintain close attachment with the country of descent. The discrepancy is also to be seen in the way the latter group regard opportunities in the host country, whereby they embrace them in the adopted country in order to be able to contribute to development in the country of descent. The defining impact of contextual factors is clearly expressed by the divergence between the diaspora-born young people and the newcomers in that the impact of culture is crucial in this process. Links with the Somali community do not in themselves explain differences

among Somali young people. What is apparent from their accounts is the complexity and multidimensionality of the process by which they define their everyday experiences, make sense of the opportunities open to them and plan, insofar as they do so, their futures.

The initial hesitation in commenting on issues related to identity noted earlier might reflect a lack of socialisation into the Somali identity, but could have also been because of the vagueness of the concept. What makes the concept of identity complicated within Somali discourses is the role of invisible clan-based identity, as discussed in Chapter 4, which to a large extent defines the community relations of the diaspora. That is, members of the first generation Somali community relate to one another in many ways, but the most important of these are the clan and regional affiliations that supersede the role of overarching shared identity. It, however, needs to be noted that the younger generation who were born or raised in the diaspora do not necessarily express their kinship-based identity. The weak Somali ethnic identity is also, in part, related to the lack of an inclusive national 'Somali' identity that unites Somalis in the diaspora. But also, based on their 'race', faith and immigration narratives, this community bears multiple identities: while a Muslim identity is deeply engrained in the selfhood of these young people, in the dominant discourses they are framed as part of the wider British black community, and, by adopting a 'refugee/asylum seeker' identity, they distinguish themselves from both the British black community and other non-refugee immigrants.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the formation of a new Somali diaspora identity among youth of a Somali background. This diaspora identity is hyphenated in different ways into complex manifestations which, though in essence revolve around Somali ethnicity, are expressed to different degrees in relation to multicultural/global and Muslim/global discourses. It has been argued that the different manifestations of this *diasporised* Somali identity are born out of three interlinked processes. First, the diaspora identity is an enactment of historical and pre-migration narratives, whereby the Somali national 'identity' has become polarised owing to the political instability in the originating country to the extent that *Somaliness* is now contested. In this void, Muslim identity has assumed a different meaning, with some young people appearing to become 'more Muslim' than their peers in the country of descent. Commenting on the lack of an overarching Somali national identity, one community worker notes: 'Because of the

shameful killings and negative stereotypes' (Idriss, community worker) associated with Somalis, many young people shy away from anything to do with them. It has been argued that the dynamics of linguistic and cultural discontinuities as well as the responses to these dynamics define young people's views towards their culture, which are reflected in their discursive self-positioning in the host countries. In this respect, I have suggested that the different emerging manifestations of the diaspora identity are an expression of the fact that the Somali diaspora community is still negotiating its place in the host society.

Second, the construction of *diasporic* identity is shaped by an adherence to an Islamic regulatory framework. As an organising framework of belonging, Islam has taken on a new function among the *diasporic* communities in that it has gained a new meaning as a source of shared identity among the Somali community. This identity forms a source of strength to deal with everyday experiences in the diaspora. In some respects, foregrounding Muslim identity as a vacuum filler is comparable to its counterpart and opposite manifestation of subscribing to multicultural/cosmopolitan identity. Perhaps more importantly, these forms of self-identification represent strategies for managing the much wider cultural and linguistic change that the Somali community is currently undergoing.

Finally, neoliberal policies and practices where the focus is on the role of the individual in identity construction may have offered young people the opportunity to write their own biographies. These policies and practices concur with the risk society discourse of late modernity (Beck, 1992). This context is marked by the individuation of identity, where identity has become diffuse, and where young people, regardless of their social or racial background, show similar lifestyle trends. Moreover, it has emerged that these young people are not passive recipients of influences, for they reflectively and continuously negotiate their identities in a host of competing social milieus. In the next three chapters I will consider the role of identity in the formation of attitudes and orientations towards the opportunities available and in the formation of expectations/aspirations, particularly in relation to education.

Chapter 6: Idealistic Choosers

6.1 Introduction

By its very nature, education is embedded in social relationships in which the immigrant family, as a socialising institution, with its history as well as its social and cultural capital, plays a significant role (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Lauglo, 2000; Warikoo, 2011). Within the widely held belief in immigrant optimism, which is an expression of the self-betterment logic implicated in migration, there is a strong motivation for social mobility. Reflecting these general trends, it has emerged from the data analysis that education is highly valued by the Somali community. This embracing of education, which is intergenerationally transmitted, reflects the widely accepted wisdom that it can be a vehicle for social mobility for people who lack economic capital and political representation (Modood, 1998; Kao and Tienda, 1995). Reflecting these perspectives, the vast majority of the Somali young people in this study position themselves inside the education system, which is considered as a ‘family project’ (Allat, 1993: 143).

As discussed in Section 3.6 of Chapter 3, I categorised young people’s choice strategies into idealistic, contingent and contextual choice-making. These categories partly reflect young people’s different life stages, which could theoretically mean that these young people could fit into the different categories at different stages of their life. Also, as noted in Chapter 3, with the generation of these categories, I drew on the work of Ball et al. (1999, 2000). This chapter discusses the first of these categories, namely idealistic choosers. The group of young people who fit into this category is represented by Ahmed, Geuddi, Omar, Suad, Hassan, Farah, Hamda and Yassin. With the exception of Farah who can be described as a newcomer in the UK, what these young people share is that they are all still in education, have no personal experiences of the employment market, and are under the age of twenty years. The two other categories of contingent choosers and contextual choosers will be discussed in Chapters 7 and 8, respectively.

6.2 Immigrant optimism

The central role of pro-education *habitus* is closely associated with migration biographies. Parents play a significant role in mediating the formation of this pro-education attitude in three different ways. First, it has emerged from the data analysis that Somali immigrant parents try to instil into their children the notion that the UK is a

country of opportunities and that education is the key to all of these. That is, the educational opportunities in the host country remind them of their experiences of education in their country of origin, where it was a rare commodity that only a few could afford and parents impart such memories to their children. Most participants in this research are driven by such an attitude of optimism, which might be linked to what Ball et al. (1999: 210) call 'imagined futures'.

Obviously you are quite lucky because you are living in a first world country. Education is a priority in this country. Education is not a priority in other countries, just work and no facilities there to help you. (Basra, 21, university student, female)

Their view of the host country as a land of opportunities evokes the natural urge of immigrants to make the most of these 'perceived' opportunities. In a few cases, the underlying motive for utilising opportunities is to use qualifications gained in the receiving country to contribute to developments in the originating one, as one young person put it: 'All my parents were saying to me [was] "you are needed at home", you have been given a great opportunity here, so contribute to the development of your country' (Amina, 25, MA university student, female). In Amina's view, educational opportunities available in the host country, not career opportunities, are to be utilised for the benefit of development in the home country, but in most cases, the emerging positive engagement with education is to achieve social mobility in the host country. The positive attitude towards education shown by most participants in this research is embedded in the migration biographies of the Somali community. This dual approach to education is, therefore, not surprising because, arguably, two of the key push factors for people to migrate are to improve their conditions and to enhance through remittances the conditions of those they have left behind in their country of origin. Support for the country of origin comes in the form of money given to one's relatives, but can also be come in the form of knowledge and skills. In shaping children's perspectives, the family, as a socialising institution, facilitates the transmission of value orientations to its children, which is achieved through the process of socialisation and through narratives.

The second strategy parents deploy in shaping their children's pro-education *habitus* is that of 'engendering a sense of obligation' (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001: 193). Furlong et al. (1996: 562) argue that through the process of primary socialisation children 'come to

share the assumptive worlds of their parents' and with this socialisation come not just perspectives, but also conforming attitudes. The parental involvement in the formation of pro-education *habitus* gains significance through authority cast in the form of normative expectations and through 'transferred responsibility' (Allat, 1993). This approach to education may not necessarily be confined to immigrant groups, but it is the emphasis that can be different for them.

My parents always wanted me to be something big, they want something that will make them proud of me. Especially my dad I cannot let him down.
(Youssuf, 16, A-level student, male)

The idea of preventing the disappointment of parents as a response to parental expectation is a recurrent theme in the young people's accounts, which is constitutive of the fundamental aspect of their conforming behaviour towards parental expectations. Without questioning, Youssuf seems to accept what his parents want him to be, because of the underlying taken-for-granted assumption that they are acting in his best interests.

My parents told me, first yeah, they've agreed for me to be an engineer, so I was kind of 'stick to that', but then afterwards [my mother] heard rumours of other people saying they wanted their sons to be doctors because it's kind of, you know, most Somali parents want their kids to be doctors. So I stick to doctor.
(Ahmed, 15, GCSE student, male)

In acknowledging the parental role in his 'figuring out' his plans for the future, Ahmed also draws on family discourse. Bourdieu (1996: 20) defines this as 'the language that the family uses about the family'. In this case, parental expectations trigger in the young people 'a sense of obligation'; this in turn commits them to avoid disappointing their parents. That is, as bearers of their family dreams, most of the Somali young people positively respond to their parental expectations and want to achieve social mobility. For families, in general, and Somali immigrant families in particular, facilitating their children's educational attainment and outcomes is so much a constant family priority that they make sacrifices to that effect, and even do so while socioeconomically not being best placed:

It is very difficult for a lot of parents because [private tuition] is too costly, but then again they see the development of their children. So a lot of people try to do that, to educate their children their own ways because a lot of Somali parents are,

you know, they don't [invest in their own education], so they try to support and seek extra help as well. (Qamar, community worker)

While parental involvement in young people's education is regarded as positive, there are, however, occasions where being driven by parental authority can be counterproductive in forming conforming behaviour. Consequently, young people can merely adopt parental advice more as a strategy of 'not letting down their parents' rather than as a way of realising their individual aspirations. However, much as young people want to write their individual biographies and in that process underplay the parental role in their choices with regard to careers, their choices are very much embedded in their immigrant family biographies. The family role is significant for two reasons. First, by its very nature the process of education is strongly embedded in social relationships in which the family, as a socialising institution, plays a vital role. Second, for immigrant families education is viewed as a family strategy for achieving intergenerational social mobility.

The majority of the respondents in this study were living with their families and for them the family site was still their main source of orientation and inspiration. The young people's accounts show that the family role mainly comes in through transmitting positive attitudes. In shaping children's perspectives, the family, as a socialising institution, facilitates the transmission of value orientations to their children. This transmission is completed through the process of 'socialisation' and through effective narratives. That is, the family sets the primary social context in which the young people develop ideas about their futures and plan their lives based on their migration biographies. It also sets the bounds within which perspectives, interests and aspirations are initiated and nurtured:

I got my mother who is always on my back telling me to revise. If I didn't have all this, I don't think I'd be in this position or like talking to you at the moment. I'd probably be drinking or smoking outside. (Omar, 14, GCSE student, male)

Omar acknowledges the intervention of his family in his 'improved performance' and in his better engagement with education. His account is an example of the role of the family in the formation of attitude towards education. Through the process of 'parental expectation' parents foster a pro-education attitude in their children and where they have relevant cultural capital, guide them through the education process by drawing on their 'experiential knowledge' (Ball et al., 1999: 215). Parental involvement also gains

significance through the process of parental authority, cast in terms of normative expectations, and on their part young people internalise the orientations, values and perspectives that have been transferred to them. They take pride in conforming and responding positively to parental expectations, which they express in terms of avoiding disappointing their parents. In fact, among the majority of the respondents there is a general feeling, although of varying degrees, of conforming to parental expectations and as bearers of family dreams they are expected to enact the collective goal of achieving social mobility. Talking about who has influenced him the most, Youssuf states:

It has to be my dad, because my dad grew up in Somalia he was going to university but he had to give up when I was born to take care of me. So he gave up everything for me. (Youssuf, 16, A-level student, male)

These examples show how parental expectations trigger ‘a sense of obligation’ (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001: 193) in the young people, which commits them to avoid disappointing their parents. In doing this, young people feel they are acknowledging the sacrifices made by their parents for their children to have a better life, because as Portes and Rumbaut (2001: 192) argue, ‘children of immigrants perceive that they are a main, if not the main, reason for the immigration of their parents’. Related to living up to the family ideals is the notion of preserving the family standing in the community. Although relations among the Somali community are in many respects polarised, it still remains a close-knit community, which leads families to become conscious of their standing within the community, a consciousness which in turn informs family strategies driven by the expectation that their children will excel in the education system.

Another strategy associated with parents’ role in their children’s education is what can be described as the ‘pressure to achieve’. In fulfilling their role, parents can be mere facilitators to help their children figure out their plans for the future, but Somali parents sometimes also exert pressure as a way of shaping their children’s engagement with education and on occasion, even their choice behaviours. This parental strategy of pressuring children not only to engage positively with the education process, but also to achieve, extends the notion of ‘transfer of responsibility’ (Allat, 1993) beyond mere parental expectations. It represents the view that Somali parents want to achieve, through their children, what they themselves would have liked to have succeeded in doing, but for whatever reason could not. More importantly, it can also be described as a way for families to enhance their position in the community; as Ahmed (15, GCSE student, male) quoted earlier noted: ‘[My mother] heard rumours of other people saying

they wanted their sons to be doctors because it's kind of, you know, most Somali parents want their kids to be doctors'.

The findings from this research show that much as young people negotiate family relationships, their families similarly negotiate dynamics within the wider Somali community relations. Like Ahmed, the experience of Sahra in relation to influences beyond her immediate family is quite illuminating. Unlike the majority of the Somalis in the UK, her father came to the UK as a seaman and she recalls how being born to a seaman has put her family under pressure from newly arrived Somali families. Her account illuminates how family embeddedness in community relations informed her mother's expectations of her:

I think my mother was a bit embarrassed being a wife of a seaman who was here for forty years and [herself] for over thirty-five years, that I, the second youngest of the family, am the first one to [go to] university, while children whose families came [into the UK] in the 1990's went through an express route to universities. She felt like she let us down. (Sahra, 25, social worker, female)

The development of Sahra's attitude towards education was in important ways defined by influences from the Somali community. Sahra recalls:

[My mother] felt that she was not able to help us much in terms of guiding us. All she could do was to pressure us, to get us doing our homework. At times when we were watching TV, she would say that we must have a homework whether I had a homework or not and she would ask us to go to our rooms. I think the support was there but it was in a different way. (Sahra, 25, social worker, female)

Basit (2012) found that a lack of necessary cultural capital does not hold back parents from engaging effectively with their children's aspirations. In the above quote Sahra explains that, regardless of the lack of first-hand experience of the UK education system, parents can still support their children by sparing them 'premature responsibilities' (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). However, the findings show that quite often parents in such situations are unable to help their children make instrumental choices in their engagement with education. Sahra notes that after the sudden death of her father, her mother assumed the extra responsibility of bringing up her children alone; she felt the agony of guiding them through the schooling system, but because of her poor

‘educational capital’ all she could do was to ‘pressure’ the children to engage positively with their education, which Sahra explains retrospectively as supporting ‘in a different way’. However, this ‘pressuring’ strategy of the Somali parents to both influence their children’s choice biography and more importantly to maintain their family standing in the eyes of their fellow Somali community is sometimes more direct than implicit:

Knowing people back home, you know, would need my help, from young age I had this sense of responsibility in me. I sort of consciously knew where I had to, not only for myself and my immediate family, but obviously for my large extended family back home would need financial support. And at the time it was something that my dad was sort of taking care of. ... but my dad sadly passed away about four, five years ago. So from that point onwards you know like my aunts, my uncles, people that he used to look after ... are sort of ringing us now and my mum she can’t handle [this]. So, it was a sense of responsibility that fell down on us, me and my brothers. (Abdirahman, 25, youth worker, male)

The way young people engage with the opportunities in the host society partly depends on the nature of their social relations within their community networks. Contact with one’s own community forms the basis through which engagement with the opportunity structures is mediated. Engagement with education is also related to identity and belonging. Following Coleman (1988), I argue that in cases where links with one’s own network are strong, self-esteem and identity follow suit and the young person may become more agential in the way he or she engages with opportunity structures. Identity has an objective bearing on the social mobility and life-chances of individuals in that it can be used as a resource by marginalised groups, but also in that can be used as a discursive tool for ‘*othering*’ certain social groups.

6.3 Adolescent optimism

As outlined in Chapters 1 and 2, early in their post-16 stage most young people’s views on their aspirations often reflect their developmental stage. They show strong belief in their agency in taking it for granted that achieving their ideal goals depends on their efforts. This optimism is mediated by the lack of the insights acquired through experiences with structural factors. Adolescents are then likely to be more positive and idealistic than those from older groups. The idealistic choice biographies are mediated by a complex reasoning process encoded in future prospects, future employability, and positively represented ‘imagined futures’ (Ball et al., 1999). Processes underlying

imagined futures can be understood in the discourses of economic rationality in which the individual as an active agent engages instrumentally with opportunities available to accrue maximum benefit. These processes have a ‘motivating effect’ (Devadason, 2007: 216) upon young people’s planning for their futures. Hassan is an example of an idealistic chooser driven by adolescent optimism:

I was actually thinking about what choice I was gonna make for a long time. I was thinking about this stuff when I was in year seven. As soon as I went to high school I was really thinking about my future. So, first of all I wanted to be an engineer, building planes, something that is important. Then I realised ‘when you can get higher both in money and in reputation a better job, because I’m good at science, that is actually one of my strongest subjects, I said ‘why not’. I’m really good in science and a doctor is purely based on Science. (Hassan, 15, GCSE student, male)

Hassan shows strong agency and belief in his individual effort to achieve his personal goals. He is clearly driven by the idea that things will be fine if you make enough effort and he represents his future in a positive light:

I’ve got a pretty straightforward idea. I’m gonna go into further education, all the way till I graduate from university. Cos that is actually my priority because I need to graduate from a university to [improve] my future. Getting a doctor’s degree. (Hassan, 15, GCSE student, male)

The positively represented imagined futures of adolescents can sometimes be driven by the materialistic rewards of career choices, and sometimes also by having an impact on society as in the case of Hassan: ‘I will be able to make a difference’. Idealistic choosers reflexively draw on personal qualities, such as ambition, motivation and academic capabilities and are convinced of the realisation of their life goals. Regarding making his GCSE subject choices, Hassan shows what Lehmann (2004: 381) calls ‘active transition behaviour’ in that he actively sought teachers’ advice, because he felt he ‘needed background information on the subjects’, as in his words ‘if you pick one that you don’t really like and that is one GCSE down and that makes your future that much harder’. Arguably, this is as far as the instrumental engagement with the education process can go, that is, excelling in education.

As will become clearer through the discussion, the theme of instrumental engagement with education has different meanings. In one sense it refers to a pro-active stance

towards education in order to engage with the education process. In another sense, instrumental engagement refers to education as a means-to-an-end. In the case of Hassan and most of the young people discussed in this chapter, who have no personal experience with the labour market, instrumental engagement with education is limited to the immediate concern of engaging. This practical engagement is mediated by his parents who are practically involved in the construction of his educational and career identity. His father is a private tutor and at the time of the interview Hassan and his friend Ahmed, who I interviewed later, were revising together at Hassan's house and getting ready for tuition. In addition, his mother works as an assistant teacher in his school. In the words of Ball et al. (2002) he is an 'embedded chooser' in that, unlike many of his Somali peers, his parents play an informed role in the construction of his learner and career identity. Moreover, his parents have linked him up with his extended family and in relation to this Hassan notes that he has been inspired by the achievement of a cousin who graduated from Harvard:

He is a doctor now as well, he earns a lot, has his own nice house, has his little villa. I like to be as successful as him. My parents once told me about him. They were like – you know a lot of parents moan because I was just playing football and not actually concentrating on my work – and my parents were like 'why don't you be like your cousin?' And ever since I've been thinking about contacting him and I started talking to him ... (Hassan, 15, GCSE student, male)

Another example of a young person whose construction of career identity is framed through the 'imagined futures' strategy is Geuddi, who states:

In the future I am planning to be a scientist insha Allah like chemistry and especially like forensic science. That is what I am planning to do. (Geuddi, 16, A-level student, male)

Geuddi's choice biography cast out in 'imagined futures' revolves around three key points: the importance of family role, the role of cultural identity, and confidence in his academic capabilities and personal efforts. It has emerged from the data analysis that adolescent optimism entails confidence in what the young see as the 'fairness of educational system in the UK', and the belief in the idea of meritocracy, thus assuming that personal motivation and ambition are all it takes to have one's aspirations realised. These imagined futures are closely related with migration biographies, for within the

immigrant optimism discourse there is a strong motivation for social mobility. Reflecting this pro-education *habitus*, Farah, who intends to study media, relates:

At the moment I'm not doing anything but I am planning to study and to work so that I can look after myself and don't have to rely on others for my living. I have high hopes for the future. I don't want to waste my time anymore, or wander aimlessly through life. I have to be a responsible, independent, have a good future so that I can become an example for others. (Farah, 21, unemployed newly arrived asylum seeker, male)

Farah rationalises his choice in light of what 'suits his personality', which he describes as 'outgoing' and 'sociable', assuming he can easily convert these personal qualities into his career outcome. Strongly driven by the instrumental values of education, he sees his future in the media because, in his words, 'you do not study for the sake of it'. He draws on an individual discourse cast in meritocratic terms 'it all depends on your effort and your qualifications'; self-actualisation thus embodies individual effort and ambition. He remains positive and determined to realise his plans and potential by combining work and study, without being concerned about the prospect of unfavourable labour market conditions or the role of structural factors in his educational outcome. The fact that newcomers, like Farah, express strong optimism, indicates the importance of migration biographies as sources of inspiration. In their study of second-generation immigrants in the US, Portes and Rumbaut (2001: 95) argue that, despite problems in the host society, immigrants maintain a positive outlook on their lives in the host society, which is reflected in 'higher expectations and sustained effort to achieve them'. Thus 'valuing of education for its own sake' must be set against its instrumental value, i.e. the view that education offers immigrant communities a means for enhancing their life-chances:

I don't think without not going to college, I don't think I wanna do a job, because if I start a job when I am in Sixth Form I'll think about my job more than [anything else]. You might think 'Oh I don't wanna get fired. I need to do this, I need to do that and you forget about your work your stuff in school', but if in half-term, after school job, yeah, and it is easy for me, I'll do it. But I don't think I'll put my whole mind in it, because I need to think about my future as well. (Ayan, 14, GCSE student, female)

In addition to subscribing to the ideology of meritocracy (Tlili, 2007), adolescent optimism is a manifestation of a strong sense of personal agency. Regarding this, Geuddi

represents his career choice merely as his own preference framed by an individual drive to achieve and by strong self-belief, but his preferences could equally be related to and framed by his extended family cultural capital. He enjoys close contact with an uncle who works in the 'forensic science industry': 'It is my uncle who has done well, by thinking of his future, apparently now he's got a good job and gets good wages'. Moreover, unlike Hassan, his positively 'imagined future' perspective reflects conviction in personal efforts, which thus appears to be an embodiment of the immigrant dream. Geuddi was born in Kenya and moved to the UK five years ago, which means that he spent his formative years in a cultural and institutional context different from that of the UK. His cultural repertoire is different from Hassan's in that he is motivated not only to achieve personal goals in his new adopted country, but also has the ambition to make a difference to his country of origin. Geuddi is driven by the idea of 'self-betterment' in the host country for the benefit of the country of descent.

What Hassan and Geuddi's accounts show is the role of family involvement in the construction of their learner and career identities, but not all idealistic choosers can draw on familial cultural capital. Many Somali parents lack experiential knowledge of the UK education system and are thus ill-equipped to assist their children in navigating through the intricate education system. It can be suggested that even those educated often have difficulties with educational settings, because they have their cultural capital in the 'wrong currency' (Gewirtz et al., 1995: 28), or sometimes they are even unable to 'provide a conducive learning environment,' as Houssein, a tutor/community worker, has observed. Therefore one way of explaining the emerging positive attitude towards education among the interviewed young people would appear to be as a form of coping strategy to deal with the uncertainties in the host country. Although they increasingly invigorate their hopefulness by extra investment in their children's education in the form of private tuition, their involvement is often limited to the creation of a positive attitude towards education, leaving instrumental engagement with the process, such as information gathering, to the young people themselves:

There was one time when I went to the doctors because I was sick and I was interested yeah in doctors, and I still am. I asked them: 'How long did it take you to become a doctor, how long like studying'? They said it was like seven years studying at university. I was like 'that is like long' ... That was one of the stuff that made me change around. And after I said 'how can I become a doctor if my

effort isn't good at school'. So I have to work double, twice as hard as I was before or even more. (Omar, 14, GCSE student, male)

In constructing their imagined futures, some idealistic choosers actively pursue instrumental information, which helps them develop strategies for achieving their aspirations, or helps them give meaning to their choices, which in turn reinforces their commitment to their chosen pathways. However, career identities defined by what Reay (1998: 527) calls the 'vagaries of chance meeting', i.e. incidental encounters with somebody whose profession young people want to emulate, have limitations. They do not take into account the 'biographically determined situation' in which time, space and place in society play a role (Schultz, 1967: 76). It can be argued that the idealistic choosers' active search for strategic information is a reflexive internalisation of 'parental expectations' (cf. Chapter 4), which they represent as their own preference by actively engaging with their career planning. In fact, many of these young people may utilise available career advice, but eventually take responsibility for their own choices.

As discussed in Chapter 4, immigrants tend to possess a strong drive that is embedded in the very migration process. Driven by the ambition to achieve social mobility, immigrant families are keen to capitalise on available educational opportunities, but because of their lack of personal experiences of the contextual conditions of their choices and ambitions, they often tend to set idealistic goals for their children, without taking into account the prevailing opportunity structures. However, quite often immigrant parents' involvement in their children's education is limited to the creation of a positive attitude towards education and the rest is left to the young person, including 'the process of information gathering' (Ball et al., 2002: 337). Therefore, one way of explaining the significance of 'cold knowledge' is the shortcomings of their family's cultural capital, i.e. absence of the so-called instrumental knowledge and information about possible options within the family setting – the family as a socialising agency (Lehmann, 2004: 381). Even where parents mediate the construction of these attributes of ambition, commitment and pro-education attitude, as shown by the accounts of Ahmed and Geuddi, who talk about their career preferences not only in terms of 'I always wanted to ...', but more in terms of 'my parents want me to ...', for these young people career choice biographies embody their immigrant familial dreams of 'making it in the host society'.

My parents always wanted me to be something big, they want something that will make them proud of me. Especially my dad I cannot let him down. (Youssuf, 16, A-level student, male)

As bearers of family dreams, young people construct their learner and career identities in accordance with parental expectations to achieve family ideals (Ball et al., 2000). Accordingly, immigrant parents push their children to achieve social mobility in the host society, often by 'stretching their cultural capital beyond its limits' (Ball et al., 1999: 212) and this over-expectation contributes to young people's shaping of ambitious career identities.

Despite the fact that young people report parental involvement in their education, their accounts show that such involvement is not instrumental in the sense that there is a disconnect between their advice on GCSE options and expected outcomes. That is, immigrant parents, although they act as mediators in their children's choice-making process, usually cannot effectively help them with the choice-process so as to improve their transition to the world of work, because of insufficient knowledge of the contextual factors that influence their children's educational outcomes. In particular, the idealistic over-expectation of Somali immigrant parents needs to be understood in the context of their lack of familiarity with the UK education system. As Amina has noted, they are not well-versed in the subtleties of the UK education system, which has an impact on their children's aspirations to have 'appropriate futures' (Jacobs et al., 1991: 610), for instrumental engagement with the educational and employment market requires familiarity with the complexities of these markets. It also requires an active engagement with the nature of the subjects available and matching their children's interest with the prevailing opportunity structures. However, quite often immigrant parental advice is devoid of practical guidance due to the maze of the transition process, and it does not necessarily correspond to what is realistically possible. However, despite these shortcomings of immigrant parents, themes of high expectation, positive attitudes towards education and a sense of hopefulness imparted by these parents to their children run through the accounts of most of the respondents. An exception to 'transferred expectations' is offered by Yassin:

My parents are happy with what I'm happy with. I know what I wanna do. I've made the choice to do engineering. (Yassin, 17, college student, male)

Yassin's choice biography involves achieving a childhood dream implied in his 'I was working with cars, that is what made me choose engineering' and when describing his plans for the future, he states 'I want to go to university and then get a job within the industry'. Although he has a firm idea about his future career as a 'mechanical engineer' and his choice is driven by interest, he appears to prefer to live in the moment. Despite having university ambitions, and with only one year to go before the time he should apply to a one, Yassin is unsure which he wants to apply to. In his 'I'm not sure right now', he clearly keeps his options open, taking one step at a time and in this respect his 'transition behaviour' is more tentative than that of the other young people discussed earlier.

The construction of an idealistic career identity is mediated through sustained socialisation processes. That is, it is through regular interactions with 'significant others' and the quality of these interactions that young people develop subjectivities and cultural repertoires of their ethnic minority communities and discursively position themselves in the wider society. Making informed choices requires access to instrumental information about opportunities and given that, to a large extent, 'life chances are a reflection of access to information' (Lash, 1994: 121), it is quite understandable that ambitious young people actively look for information outside their family circles. The theme of information, then, as an integral constituent of family cultural capital, plays a significant role in shaping preferences.

While the notion of imagined futures explains much of the processes underlying the formation about idealistic career choices, it would, however, be a mistake to reduce young people's imagined futures to materialistic motives, for some are driven by interest and passion for their subjects. Hamda is a good example: 'I was always interested in business. ... especially the economic side and I was also interested in marketing. Marketing is one of my favourite subjects'. In explaining her reasons for the choice of the profession she is aspiring to get into whilst studying for her degree, Hamda draws on a discourse of personal qualities by stating that 'doing research is one of my strengths'. She also talks in terms of 'I enjoy doing it' because 'it is a fun job'. Her choice, then, is predominantly driven by passion, interest and desire, and although she talks only in passing about attending an open day at school, she explains her choice as 'realising high school years' ambitions'. In this respect, her story is significant in that it shows that, in line with the 'age' argument (Baird et al., 2008; Ginsberg et al., 1951), it is not always the case that young people 'grow out of their ambitions'. As I discuss later, the notion of

‘interest’ has a temporal dimension. Like the majority of the respondents in this study, Hamda, who helps her mother with a small family business, is the first in her family to go to university and her imagined future is driven by ‘having fun in what you do’. She remains positive and confident about achieving her ideals:

Oh! I see myself in a stable job as a market researcher. Maybe building a house in Somaliland in Hargeysa or Berbera near the sea, yeah or maybe kids or married.
(Hamda, 21, university student, female)

Hamda’s account shows the *agentic* dimension of her choice biography cast in the language of ‘desire’, ‘interest’ and ‘passion’ that frame the construction of idealistic choices. In contrast to the materialistic motives underlying Hassan, Geuddi, and Omar’s decision-making, Hamda’s source of motivation is ‘interest’. Another example of passion-driven career aspiration runs through the account of Suad, who like Hamda, wants to find a ‘fit’ between her interest and her career by using her favourite subject, maths, to pursue a career as an accountant, which is ‘one of the things [she] wants to be in life’. She is ‘not bothered about the money’ as for her ‘payment does not really matter’:

Because I enjoy doing maths and ... like ... and ‘cos I go to tuition classes and my maths has then improved. And I thought if I want to become an accountant I have to study hard and do a lot of stuff that involves maths and stuff. (Suad, 14, GCSE student, female)

This quote represents an account of *agentic*, passion-driven choices around futures cast in the language of ‘passion’ and ‘enjoyment’. With this perspective, desired aspirations are idealistic in the sense that the intention is to turn hobbies into careers, because both education and work are seen as ‘fun’. In fact, one striking feature in the accounts of some of the idealist choosers, like Suad and Hamda, is that their choice biographies revolve around ‘interest’ in the subject. For such choosers to ‘enjoy doing’ a certain career is more important in shaping their career identities than having ‘a pay-driven boring job’. For these young people, this ‘liking, enjoying’ embodies an active and agential engagement with their choices that can be set against a more passive and mechanical engagement with choices. What their accounts show is that not all idealistic choosers are driven by materialistic motives. Ball et al. (1999: 210), commenting on young people driven by ‘interest’ as a strategy for engaging with the different stages of

education, point out that such a trajectory ‘is a natural sequence that is viewed both as satisfying and rewarding in its own right and a sensible “investment” of time and energy that will provide’.

Agency

A key theme that runs through the accounts of the choice biographies discussed above is the young people’s strong sense of being in control of their destinies. One way of explaining the strong agency shown by these young people is to consider their life stage. It has been raised in Chapters 1 and 2 that adolescents are often driven by developmental optimism; they tend to claim their choices solely reflect their own individual actions. That is, despite close family involvement in their choices, not all young people are prepared to acknowledge the role of their parents in their choice biographies, preferring instead to draw on individual discourses. In addition to the ‘received attitude’ embedded in their migration histories, which is transmitted inter-generationally, most Somali young people, like their peers from other communities, have a strong preference to write their individual biographies, showing these tendencies through their discursive self-portrayal and by downplaying familial influences on their choices. This is no coincidence, because the very idea of a ‘choice biography’ is an integral part of late modernity discourses where emphasis is put on active and reflexive engagement with life choices (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991). That is, in late modernity collective dimensions of the formation of aspirations have become problematised and correspondingly the active role of the individual in writing their choice biographies has become foregrounded.

As discussed in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, critical consciousness and subjectivity of the human agency are the key definers of the ways in which young people go about making their life choices. This strong preference to exercise choice not only stands in opposition to the familial and contextual dimensions of choice, but also transcends ‘race’, gender and class boundaries. That is, regardless of their social and racial positioning, the Somali young people, like their peers from other communities, show/claim strong agency in their choices. They take ownership of their choices to the extent that they regard failure to achieve goals as a personal shortcoming. They are more concerned about their individual interests, exploring their individual strategies for engaging with opportunities, than worrying about their positions in society. In the following quotes, Geuddi and Youssuf, who are cousins, show how their intended career

choices coincide with that of an uncle who, Geuddi states, ‘works as a forensic scientist with the police’,

I was already planning to do it when one day my uncle asked me what I would like to do, and I said ‘forensic science’ and he said ‘that is what I do’. I could not believe it. I asked him what I needed to do and he told me ‘It is not that hard. All that you need to do is to focus’. (Geuddi, 16, A-level student, male)

On the question of ‘what attracted you to [your aspired] profession?’ Youssuf explains:

Since I was young I’ve always watched movies and followed doctors doing research on TV and I’ve liked it since then. Also one of my uncles took me to a doctor last time who showed me how things work and since that work experience I’ve loved to become one myself. (Youssuf, 16, A-level student, male)

Drawing on individual discourses, Geuddi and Youssuf only refer in passing to their uncle. What is interesting in their accounts is that their choices not only coincide with their uncle’s profession, but also with one another’s. They both explain away what appears to be an apparent influence on their educational aspirations as mere coincidence and instead both ‘claim agency for their choices’ (Thomson et al., 2002: 349). However, despite explaining his choice in terms of personal preferences, Geuddi acknowledges that his family played a role in his engagement with education. For him, many of the problems facing Somali young people have familial causes and in his view ‘family as an entity is not fulfilling its role’ in solving these. Geuddi’s pro-education *habitus* is embodied in his migration biographies, for elsewhere in the interview, having been born in Kenya he talks of his country of descent [Somalia], which he describes not only as a source of the development of his personal identity, but more importantly as a source of his inspiration. Foskett and Hesketh (1997: 305) similarly find that young people are more likely to be influenced by their parents in their educational choices than they ‘would either care to admit or realise’.

Downplaying others’ influences on one’s actions indicates that influences transmitted through family socialisation are difficult to demarcate. As Emmet (1966: 126) argues, people’s orientations are closely related to their membership in social groups, to their position in these groups, and the relations of these groups to other social groups. Yet ‘it is difficult to identify where other’s influences end and one’s efforts begin’ (p. 122). The construction of a choice biography is mediated through sustained socialisation processes.

That is, it is through regular interactions with others and the quality of these interactions that young people develop subjectivities and cultural repertoires of their communities, and discursively position themselves in the wider society. In other words, there appears to be a link between the significance Geuddi attaches to 'his country of descent' and his views towards educational opportunities in the 'host country'. His positive attitude is reinforced by his family. Youssuf, shares similar plans with Geuddi, and the development of his orientation resembles that of Geuddi. Youssuf plans to go into 'something to do with forensic science or something to do with medicine'. Even though young people might readily accept influences from significant others, i.e. conform to what is expected of them, they yet remain 'purposeful and agentic' (Ball et al., 2000: 91). However, a distinction needs to be made between strong agency and belief in strong agency. The latter could be seen as indicative of lack of agency to the extent this could be seen as a situation where the meritocratic ideological structure is working through the young people. For, quite often structure permeates both 'agency and collectivities' (Francis and Archer, 2004: 25). Thus, this 'belief in strong agency' resonates with Willis's (1977) classic study of 'how working class kids get working class jobs'.

6.4 Defaulting into education

Idealistic over-expectations shown by most young people driven by the generalised optimism described above are bound up with the nexus of age, information and experiences, but are not reducible merely to these dimensions. As discussed in Chapter 4, engagement with education has taken on a new meaning for Somali parents. In contemporary times young people in general face great uncertainties and the objective realities in the labour market are not favourable or promising for them. Those of immigrant backgrounds face additional structural inequalities in the labour market. With the internalisation of the objective realities of inequalities of opportunities, one would have expected to find a less optimistic, if not an outright rejection of schooling and a dismissive attitude towards the utility of meritocracy. Even if young people consider 'failure' as an individual 'fate', certainly the overwhelmingly positive attitude shown by the young people in this study requires different explanations.

In light of the accounts of the young people, particularly those at the school-age stage, one might suggest that the emerging positive attitude towards education is not merely related to the meritocratic values of education. One might argue that in contemplating their choices, idealistic choosers seem not to analyse critically how, in Bourdieu's terms,

their capabilities meet their probabilities of achieving their desired outcomes; because the notion of 'idealism' entails downplaying the risk of barriers. However, idealistic choosing is not necessarily an antithesis to realistic choosing, for its exponents, regardless of what drives them (adolescent optimism or immigrant optimism), reflexively engage with their agential capacity. That is, agential capacity or personal qualities drive them to engage constructively with their plans. Overall, the expression of ambition and optimism is framed by a complex interaction between age and individual level factors and is further conditioned by the expectations transferred from immigrant families towards their children. For the Somali immigrant families, education goes beyond its instrumental utility. For some of the young people though, engagement with the education process is out of practical concern: there is simply no alternative than staying on in education.

Like their counterparts from immigrant communities, Somali young people operate in highly charged and competing cultural fields. Family and peers set different demands on how they engage with social expectations. There is a contradiction between the cultural, institutional, educational and political context in which they operate on a day-to-day basis and the values carried over by their immigrant parents from their country of origin. Contextual conditions, therefore, not only offer possibilities, but also pose challenges to the young people's 'ontological security' (Giddens, 1991). In their participation in different relationships with the host culture and with their cultural heritage, their views at times clash with those of their parents. In short, the growing up young people are not necessarily only being shaped into 'conforming', but as critical agents, and as agents of change, they contribute to the dynamics of their family processes in which their growing old parents become acculturated (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2004). Where the parental role proves significant is in the intergenerational transmission of values and perspectives. Through interaction parents impart or reinforce normative and conformist attitudes so that their children do not drift away, but as I discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, what young people require from their parents is not limited to their transmitting normative values, but help in dealing with the multiple facets of transition.

One of the key push factors for people to migrate is to improve their conditions. Ayan's 'education first' attitude and willingness to postpone entry into the job market until she obtains a university qualification, even if there is an opportunity, signifies how much education is valued. However, this 'value-based' explanation of the positive attitude

towards education poses critical questions about the instrumental approach to education discussed earlier. It can be argued that young people's 'horizon for action' at the school leaving age is very much constrained by their limited life experiences (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997). According to this view, school-leavers, due to their limited lived experience, feel that they are faced with the simple 'dilemma' of either staying-on or dropping out, which in the context of the current youth labour market is not really a dilemma. Employment opportunities for young people have drastically fallen since the 1970s (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997) and changes in the employment market call for different explanatory models to understand contradictions of agency and structure. Although young people tend to rationalise their positive attitude towards education as an active choice, one might argue that lack of alternatives makes education the only available option. And with education being the only feasible option, the positive engagement with education is not necessarily a conscious choice, but a choice made unavoidable owing to the lack of alternatives, or in other words, a 'virtue made of necessity' (Bourdieu, 1984: 372), which is 'to refuse what is anyway denied and to will the inevitable' (Bourdieu, 1990: 54). Tacitly internalised ideas of limited opportunities become part of young people's *habitus* which in turn informs their attitude towards the future. This 'defaulting' of positive engagement with the education process raises critical questions about the role of agency in engaging with the education process as a purposeful and active choice. For, much of what passes for autonomous decision-making is an internalisation of objective externalities (Bourdieu, 1977).

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has considered the development of attitudes towards education. It has outlined that the development of attitudes is strongly related to the migration biographies of the Somali immigrant family. Immigrants use education instrumentally as a way of enhancing their life-chances to compensate for their disadvantaged position in the host society. Values embedded in migration biographies are intergenerationally transmitted through family relationships. In family settings, parents set priorities for their children and transfer to them the 'immigrant dream' underpinning their presence in the host society. The chapter has shown that young people incorporate values and orientations towards education received through family interactions, but try to project their aspirations as an individualised orientation. The individualisation of 'received attitude' is difficult to separate out from familial or collective immigration biographies transmitted through family interactions. Through family relationships, ideas, interests

and attitudes evolve in such a tacit way that young people hardly notice family influence on their choices, and claim the ‘received attitude’ as their own. They are expected to study. Young people’s experiences are, however, not solely determined by the migration biographies. For, in addition to the “received attitude” embedded in their migration histories, they show strong agential tendencies of exerting individual biographies by downplaying familial influences on their choices. Ambition is embedded in migration, since the very process of migration is associated with self-betterment, and it is also related to age (cf. Chapter 2). The key dimensions of agency, autonomy, identity, individual and collective biographies, constitutive of the central theme of ‘positive engagement with education’, also underpin the development of educational expectations and aspirations that will be discussed in Chapter 7.

Chapter 7: Contingent Choosers

7.1 Introduction

Despite societal normative expectations that young people should have a career plan, not all are clear about their plans for the future and when they are, they often remains unclear about how to achieve them. In this chapter, I discuss a second strategy young people deploy in the choice-making process: keeping options open. I differentiate three dimensions of this strategy. First, I begin the discussion with the role of family cultural capital and argue that this tendency of ‘keeping options open’ is related to family cultural capital. Second, I suggest that some young people’s deployment of this contingency planning is a way of managing the risks associated with contemporary youth transition. In the third section of the chapter, I discuss how young people tend to resort to the ‘immediacy of the present’ (Elster, 1989) to get through the critical decision moments of the choice-making process.

7.2 Family cultural capital

Somali young people, many of whom are either born or raised in the diaspora, have different aspirations, outlooks and orientations towards identity and belonging from those of their parents’ generation. One way of making sense of the intergenerational differences and concerns raised is to explore issues relating to the family’s cultural capital. Here it is suggested that there is a mismatch between what parents expect of their children and the context within which they are growing up. This intergenerational tension leans towards an over-expectation on the part of Somali parents, which can be understood within the context of their ‘family *habitus*’ (Archer et al., 2012). Driven by the ambition to achieve social mobility, they are keen to capitalise on available educational opportunities, but they cannot effectively help their children with the choice-process. Parental expectations foster a pro-education attitude in their children, but when it comes to outcomes, they are ill-equipped to guide them effectively through the education process, and even less so through the transition into the world of work, because they lack appropriate ‘experiential knowledge’ of the system (Ball et al., 1999: 215). With the benefit of hindsight, Amina relates that her parents were ill-equipped to guide her effectively through the education process:

Despite the fact that my parents were educated, they were limited in what they were able to give me, because they had not that first-hand experience of being

here. Maybe for my children the limitations will become less and maybe the prospect will be better. (Amina, 25, MA university student, female)

Amina's account shows the significant role education as a collective family dream played in her early life. She went to a private school for her A-level equivalent education in the Netherlands. Her father was proactive in the children's education and for him to have spotted an international private school in her village in the Netherlands where she grew up was an expression of the significance her parents attached to education. This international private education gave her, in her words, 'great advantages', something she could not discern at the time, but later appreciated. She recalls she did not know why 'he has to take us out of our familiar surroundings and go to a different school'. Yet, Amina is aware of the fact that the parental support she received was restricted to a 'fostering attitude' and 'creating an advantage'. In her view, Somali parents are disadvantaged because they have no first-hand experience of the British education system and are thus ill-equipped to help their children achieve better educational outcomes. For Amina, educational outcomes and transition into employment require networking skills, which Somali young people lack, because these attributes, unlike other inter-generationally transferable attributes of 'orientation', 'values', 'conformity', and 'motivation', are not 'given from their homes'. It is suggested that quite often Somali parents are ill-equipped to help their children navigate through the intricate UK education system. Similar themes of lack of 'experiential knowledge' emerge from Aisha's account:

I did know that I could do A-levels. The thing is I've applied for it a bit late because I was still, I started in September my Year 11 I started in November when the mock exams were happening and all of that. Everybody else in my class has already done their application forms because you have to put in an application for A-levels quite early and I didn't know about that. I had to actually go and see my tutor and say you know 'what are my options, what can I study?' I did put in my application for A-levels but they said my application was too late.... So my second best option was to take a BTEC National diploma instead of wasting one more year. (Aisha, 20, gap year student, female)

Having recently arrived in the UK, Aisha's narrative shows she lacked familiarity with the subtleties of the way in which education is organised in the UK. Although she takes pride in the fact that her 'mom has got Masters' and she also has an older brother who

went through the GCSE process, she still has struggled with her post-16 choices and with finding her way through the choice process. Consequently, she has decided to take a gap year before she starts her university degree course. Aisha who would be the second in her family 'to go to university' could not draw on her mother for practical support with the choice process. Regarding this point, one community worker notes that:

Children do not consult with their parents. They make their choices during lunch breaks or while playing football with their friends ... They just ask their peers what they have chosen and for the teacher as long as the forms are returned ... sometimes parents may not even be aware their children are making choices. For parents it is only exams that matter, not making GCSE choices. They just let it be over to the child to choose whatever the child is good at. (Salah, community worker)

As appears from Aisha's account, even children with educated parents are likely to experience difficulties in educational settings, because the latter's cultural capital is in the 'wrong currency' (Gewirtz et al., 1995: 28). The theme of lack of appropriate cultural capital can be explained in terms of 'role models' presented as the missing link in youth transition. One community worker notes:

It is very difficult for young people without role models, raised by single mothers, for example to decide what course of action they gonna take, what course of study they gonna take because it is very confusing for young people. Most Somali leave secondary school without knowing what subjects or career path they are going to take, because from young age they were not coached in this. So from that perspective I think Somali young people are in difficult situations because of lack of career, the situation back home, no parental guidance, or advice from other senior members of the community. (Mustafa, community worker)

In some ways this point about 'role models' is related to the intergenerational gap between children and their foreign-born parents, and it is suggested that first generation Somalis are unable to help their children navigate through the complex education system. Commenting on the 'cultural capital in the wrong currency' point, one community leader puts it thus:

Probably the fact that a lot of Somalis ... with qualifications are not acting as a good role model in the sense that they are not successfully employed or [are] underemployed. So for example a child sees his father who has a lot of qualifications, be it a qualified doctor back home in Somalia or served in the Armed Forces or a professor at the Somali National University back home, unemployed or at best employed as a security guard or similar sort of things. The child would say: 'Hey! What is the point of me trying hard? It hasn't taken you anywhere. Why bother?' (Hamud, tutor/community worker)

The experiences of the educated but unemployed parents have a knock-on effect on their children's construction of learner identities: 'young people are now questioning the role of education in terms of creating economic opportunities. You don't get job with it, why should you pursue it?' (Houssein, tutor/community worker). High unemployment among the first generation is cited as demotivating for young people's engagement with the education process. Although the educational outcomes of Somali young people are explained in terms of their parents' lack of knowledge and experience of the UK education system, it is equally quite plausible that an awareness of these shortcomings and a desire to compensate for them serve as an impetus for parents to increase investment in their children's education. This may explain the popularity of private tuition among the Somali community. For there is a growing awareness that intergenerational dissonances have implications for the social mobility of the community in that the young are not only left to navigate through the complex career and educational institutions in the UK on their own, but also are left vulnerable to the possible negative peer influences of their neighbourhoods (Foner and Dreby, 2011: 567).

The parental role proves to be significant in the intergenerational transmission of values and perspectives, for through interaction they impart or reinforce normative and conformist attitudes so that their children do not drift away. For the parent generation, achieving these aims is to be celebrated because of the discontinuities they face in the host culture (cf. Chapter 4 and 5). However, Somali young people require more than parents transmitting normative values or demanding conformism; they equally require guidance with developing realistic educational and career plans as well as help with instrumental engagement in the education process; instrumental in the sense of career outcomes. Young people feel that their parents' involvement in their education is limited to instilling a positive attitude towards schooling, but that they are ill-equipped to help

them climb the employment ladder. Educational outcomes require different skills, such as networking, which most Somali young people 'are not given from their homes'. It is these social relationships that the accounts of the young people in this study reveal they miss, and due to this lack they face challenges in converting their educational capital into economic capital.

7.3 Contingency as a risk managing strategy

Thinking in terms of contingencies can be understood in light of Beck's concept of 'choice biography', where 'risk management' is at the heart of the ways in which young people engage with opportunities. In relation to the transition of young people, a discourse of risk management has become current in late modernity (Lehmann, 2004) for two main reasons: first, it is because of the 'endless possibilities' (Morgan and Idriss, 2012) in today's society in which individuals are increasingly expected to write their own biographies and because of the simultaneous uncertainties they face in the labour market. Second, within this discourse there is much emphasis on individual responsibilities and on the developing young person taking on a multiplicity of fluid career identities. Ali (a 15-year-old GCSE student) offers a good example of multiple planning as a way of managing uncertainties. His anticipated careers range from dentistry, business, going into the ICT sector and earning his living as a footballer. He rationalises his parallel planning as a strategy for maximising his GCSE options, for these include business studies, ICT, resistant materials (design and technology) and media studies, which sounds contradictory with his career aspirations. While each of his GCSEs might support a possible career pathway, his more serious consideration is choosing between training as a dentist or a footballer. The choice of his GCSE options is underpinned, to a certain degree, by an 'open approach' to the future, because he is sceptical about the unpredictable adult world of work. Asked why he chose to do business, he states:

Because I wanna do [business] in the future, maybe fifty-fifty. If I don't become a dentist, I want to do something to do with business, ICT something like that.
(Ali, 15, GCSE student, male)

Ali's account resonates with uncertainties, partly because career choice-making is an evolving process, and partly because choices are also constrained by performance in exams. The uncertainty is also partly related to a lack of information around the job market, and to a lack of clarity and familiarity with regard to the nature of school

subjects and the associated educational and career outcomes. He is the first in his family to go through the GCSE process. An important theme in his account is that his career aspirations are more a socialised preference than a reflection of an individual one. Explaining how he made the choice to be a dentist, he says:

My dad once, like, asked us ‘Who wants to be a doctor?’ ‘One of us has to be a doctor’, he told us. So I thought ‘I wanna be a dentist like it was quite fun and you enjoy’. There was this man we went to; he’s dentist and he was telling me everything about dentistry. It is not hard (...) you don’t do lots of work and you get paid a lot. And he said ‘these days yeah we don’t have dentists’. So it is easy to get in if you work hard. (Ali, 15, GCSE student, male)

Ali’s account can be read in different ways. One way of interpreting it is that he is struggling to choose between living out his parental expectations of ‘dad wanting one of [his] children to become a doctor,’ and his volunteering to be one, and pursuing his own individual interest in professional football. Ali appears to be happy to have tentatively resolved this dilemma by reducing his individual interest to a ‘contingency plan’. He plays for a local club and knows all too well that getting into paid football is highly competitive, rating his chances of developing a career in football as being less likely than qualifying as a dentist, and reassures himself that with ‘football you don’t have much chances, but you have more chances with the dentist’. In this analysis, Ali draws on a discourse of individualisation, whereby he turns his father’s advice into his own by immediately invoking the role of an incidental encounter with a dentist in the construction of his choice biography. Moreover, Ali’s account also shows that the intergenerational relationship between parents and their children is complex, being fraught with a constant tension between the young person’s preference and parental preference. Parents tend to pass on their own aspirations. That is, they aspire for their children to achieve that which they themselves were unable to. However, it is equally important to note that the prospects of young people are bound up with ‘parameters set by both access to learning opportunities and collective norms’ (Rees et al., 1997: 485).

Another way of reading Ali’s account is to consider his imaginative way of acquiring strategic information and finding a ‘role model’ outside his immediate family setting, which not only indicates his determination to achieve his goals, but also reveals the nature and level of cultural capital available to him at a family level. In such cases, parental involvement is limited to the ‘transfer of expectations’, regarding which Ali states that his father expected ‘one of his children to train as a doctor’. Contingency

planning not only entails having parallel plans, but also being open to other, as yet not on the horizon, careers. However, his account does not show the conviction which idealistic choosers show in their individual efforts. Similar themes of openness and contingencies run through Nasir's account whose choice biography is driven by the immediate utility of his choices rather than the longer term expected career outcome. In contrast to Ali, he regards himself academically as 'just average': 'I am not proper smart who gets A's and stuff', and discursively positions himself as low in terms of academic achievement: 'I'm just that type of person getting a couple of B's and C's and maybe a D for a couple of subjects'. This appropriated self-image further shapes his ambitions for the future which he cautiously describes:

If maths goes well I want to become a bank manager or I might wanna become um a software engineer. (Nasir, 15, GCSE student, male)

For young people like Nasir, aspirations change when confronted with new situations which they can have hardly anticipated; thinking in contingencies, then, embodies young people's risk consciousness. Although contingent attitudes towards the future shown by Ali and Nasir could also be understood in terms of their limited insight into, and lack of personal experience of the prevailing opportunity structures, it can also be argued that underlying the tentativeness of their plans is a strategy to manage the risk and uncertainties involved in career planning.

Unlike the tendencies of over-expectation characteristic of idealistic choosers, contingent choosers have a slightly more open attitude towards their futures. Kaysar (a 15-year-old GCSE student) is an example of a young person showing this tendency. With two older siblings, he is not the first in his family to go through the GCSE process, but he is not that keen to learn from the experiences of his siblings, simply because his preferences differ. His 'learner identity' is one of mixed feelings expressed in his attitude towards schooling: 'It is alright. It has its good points and its bad points'. Although he says his teachers should be 'more trusting towards him', his learner identity is framed by the positive expectations and predictions of them that he will obtain high grades. He has high expectations for his GCSEs:

I am doing well in all subjects. I think every single subject I've been entered for higher except for the coursework for the maths course, everyone at school is doing foundation at school for that one. (Kaysar, 15, GCSE student, male)

Explaining his choice strategy Kaysar states:

ICT I chose because I want to do it in college, business I chose, I might be doing business in future life, and PE I chose because I enjoy it. (Kaysar, 15, GCSE student, male)

In deciding on career plans, contingent choosers maintain parallel plans, which they continuously review at 'turning points', such as when they choose subject options or when they receive exam results. Each of Kaysar's GCSE options embodies a possible career route, but underlying his choice strategy is an attempt to experiment with any choices (Strauss, 1962:81). He comments 'Cos when I chose business I wasn't sure what I wanted to be ... Now I'm sure. I wanna be an electronic engineer'. From this it can be seen that he explains his contingencies in terms of being more concerned about the job at hand, leaving his educational and career outcomes to depend on his capabilities.

Some of the contingent choosers are aware of the limitations of their learner identities. Nasir's account is a good example, for, in contemplating contingencies, his narrative shows a 'fragile learner' identity (Ball et al., 2000). In his statement 'I can't be asked', he is admittedly conscious of the limitation of his learner identity, which he is not prepared to stretch beyond what he can manage. That is, in his approach towards his future, he employs an effort avoiding strategy. He further displays this strategy through his cautious approach to selecting his GCSE options, which is underpinned by the required effort: 'how hard it is gonna be, what you have to do, how much coursework is there gonna be, how much exam is there gonna be, that kind of stuff'. Similarly, when explaining why he wants to pursue a career in the banking sector, he says he did not choose business simply because friends warned 'business is one of the hardest subjects'. Moreover, he describes history as a boring subject 'because that is mostly talking and reading' and yet chooses it for his GCSE options because he believes it is easy to get good grades. The same effort avoiding strategy underpins his choice of the French language, which he chose 'because it makes me [him] stand out of from other people, innit', but still of which he said 'language is confusing and all of these words mixing up; can't be asked to learn more'; and his choice of ICT, regarding which a friend advised him 'you should take it; you get the grade easily'. Nevertheless, Nasir hopes for a good educational outcome:

I wanna have a good life. I wanna become a bank manager as I said in the beginning or a software engineer and have a good life. (Nasir, 15, GCSE student, male)

Despite ambitions of ‘aiming high’ and aspiring to become a ‘bank manager’ or a ‘software engineer’, he talks in terms of what Ball et al., call ‘social minimalism’ (Ball et al., 2000: 109), which could be described as expecting a maximum outcome out of minimum effort. Asked whether he has a role model, like the majority of his peers, Nasir replies ‘I wanna be my own person. I wanna be myself’. His choice biography can be described as one of ‘taking it easy’.

Furlong and Cartmel (2007: 14) argue that in the postmodern world old regularities and patterns of youth transitions have become ever more complex and unpredictable. The complexity of the choice-making process is manifest in the fact that different young people either experience similar conditions differently, or respond to similar experiences differently. It is these differences which distinguish contingent choosers, like Kaysar and Nasir, from the more ambitious choosers described earlier. While the latter group draws on personal agency to confront challenges in the transition process, the choice biographies of young people with a less strong sense of agency are ‘heavily bounded by contingencies’ (Ball et al., 2000: 104). That is, the cautious attitude shown by contingent choosers bears witness to the temporality of career plans based on mere ambition and passion, and to a critical awareness that career planning involves continuous re-adjustment. Moreover, it also bears witness to the young people’s choice biographies in contemporary times (Bois-Reymond, 1998) where uncertainties and risk have become key definers of their lives. Keeping options open can in this respect be understood as a means of risk management. The avoidance of making choices too early may indicate these young people’s awareness of the psychological commitment that choice-making entails. Finally, they contribute to the construction of their biographies as a reflective process of connecting personal and social change (Giddens, 1991). With the benefit of hindsight, Deqa explains her experiences with early post-16 choice-making processes:

[W]hen it came to choosing like what I wanted to do for A-levels, it was really hard for me because I was like ‘I don’t really know what to choose’. Cos you know you are so young you don’t really think what you gonna go into. So, in the beginning think about your grades. I did basically choose, it wasn’t random, but they didn’t all go together [either]. (Deqa, 21, university student, female)

In terms of cultural capital, Deqa could be described as ‘well placed’, for she has an extended family network that supports the construction of her choice biography. Although she appears confident and committed to a career in the caring profession, she

is still cautious and keeps open a number of contingencies, because of uncertainties around the future. Through her words 'I'm not sure, because I'm only in my first year', she accepts that she 'does not know what's gonna happen like next', and is more concerned about 'passing into second year' than worrying about the distant future. And asked about where she would be in five years she responds 'working, hopefully'. Her contingencies include 'moving to the US', or 'setting up own business', while she also states:

I know I am obviously going into health care, but I was also very interested in businesses and I wanna go into something bigger businesses, like on the side have my own business. (Deqa, 21, university student, female)

In the foregoing I have drawn on the accounts of young people early in their post-16 stage and by doing so, I have emphasised the importance of the role of 'age' in the construction of their choice biography. An exception to this is the case of Deqa, whose account shows that contingency planning is not necessarily defined by age. She draws on the individualistic discourse of blaming only herself, 'if only I worked a bit harder', for any mishaps. Despite the fact that she is embedded in an extended family relationship and she follows in the footsteps of an older sister who completed a degree on the same course, she still thinks that this choice was her own decision. For example, her sister is a radiotherapist and when asked about the role of her sister in her choice making, Deqa states:

I think it helped because it is someone giving me a bit of advice as well, but I think either way whatever I would have done like when I thought about it probably I would have wanted to have done something in the health care. So it could've been any of them. It could have been occupational therapy or physiotherapy. (Deqa, 21, university student, female)

Like the majority of young people, Deqa speaks in terms of an individualisation discourse, whereby her account supports the view that personal experience is an important determinant in the construction of career identities. A third characteristic of this group is that their expectations are not as lofty as the idealist choosers. It is understandable, then, that contingent choosers prefer to postpone their career planning. The accounts of young people who follow this strategy show how choice is bound up

with a complex nexus of interrelated factors of which age, social background, information and experience are key. Contingent choosers tend to be younger respondents still in the education process because 'being in education' is what talking in terms of 'contingencies' entails. However, a contingency strategy not only reflects a lack of necessary life experiences to understand the complexities of contextual factors that eventually determine educational outcomes; it also involves managing the risks and uncertainties of career planning. As Staff et al. (2010: 3) argue, to have no clearly defined career plan offers young people the advantage of being flexible and responding to the changing context of opportunities.

Ball et al. (2002), in their study of how ethnic minority students go about higher education choices, differentiate 'contingent choosers' and 'embedded choosers', basing their distinction on the socioeconomic background of the students. For Ball et al. (2002: 337), contingent choosers are 'typically first generation applicants to higher education', whose aspiration is not static, but is kept open, being determined by the outcomes of their efforts. To some extent, the strategy of 'keeping options open' resembles Ball et al.'s typology. Elsewhere, Ball et al. (2000) found that young people's choices for post-16 pathways are contingent upon their evolving lived experiences. Career planning requires serious engagement, but for most young people still early in their education, this does not play a central part in their lives. Some consciously decide not to conform to the normative expectations of society, but rather, adopt an attitude of 'I'll see how it goes'. It is arguably the case that in late modernity young people strive, and are expected, to construct their own 'individual choice biographies' (Rudd, 1997). Yet, the mere fact that inequalities continue to persist along racial and social lines problematises how *agential* agents actually are. In this regard Furlong and Cartmel note:

[S]ubjectively young people are forced to reflexively negotiate a complex set of routes into the labour market and, in doing so, develop a sense that they alone are responsible for their labour market outcomes. (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997: 39)

If the young person's preferences differ from his or her parents' ideals, a tension arises between the young person's desire to live out his or her ambitions and the pressure to conform to parental expectations. Understood in this context, the parental role, then, poses critical questions about the extent to which conforming young people are agential in the construction of their 'learner identities' (Ball et al. 2000). One can argue that

‘conformists’ respond, although to different degrees, to parental expectations. In other words, the pro-education attitudes received through intergenerational relationships, which inform conforming young people’s actions and choices, are not as agential as they appear to be at first sight, and precisely because of this, it is likely that ‘received attitudes’ suffer inherent shortcomings. Most school-aged young people report that further consolidation of their post-16 plans is contingent on their exam grades. Such a contingency indicates not only the tentative nature of their plans, but also the discrepancy between their individual aspirations based on ability and the transferred expectation of their parents.

The emergence of contingency planning could be explained in the context of discourses of individualisation. Individual responsibility is an important value promoted by schools (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997), whereby actions must be owned, even when significantly mediated through socialisation and interaction with significant others. In late modernity individuals increasingly choose their individual biographies (Evans, 2002), but indeed the properties of these biographies are in part internalised influences from others. What young people perceive as personal preferences are the product of interaction with others, for how they recognise opportunities, appreciate and value them is bound up with their immediate social world (Bourdieu, 1984). For example, parents play a significant role in the construction of perspectives, although as Bourdieu argues ‘they merely reinforce dispositions imposed by the objective conditions’ (p. 381). Clearly, socialisation and interaction shape the formation of ideas.

7.4 Immediacy of the present

Another important distinction between the two groups is that while idealistic choosers are driven by thoughts about their imagined and desired future career destinations and therefore show strong agency, contingent choosers are driven by exam grades and are less enthusiastic in their plans, because their choices relate to diverse career routes involving vague preferences. Consequently, they experiment with choices by adopting a cautious attitude towards their futures, remaining flexible and choosing not to commit themselves prematurely to any career pathways, thus keeping their options largely open.

When I left college we had to start picking our degree what we wanted to do for UCAS. They gave us a deadline to pick what we wanted to pick and start applying for the universities. So I just had to find something I like to pick before the deadline went. (Basma, 21, university student, female)

It would appear that their cautious attitude could also be seen as a reflection of their awareness of the changing nature of aspirations. That is, although young people like Basra share with the idealistic choosers the optimistic attitude towards their futures as discussed in the previous chapter, where they differ from the latter group is that when confronted with critical decision moments they are more concerned about the pressure and ‘immediacy’ (Elster, 1989: 36) of defining ‘fateful moments’, such as choosing GCSE options or meeting UCAS application deadlines, i.e. ‘when choices crystallise into decisions’ (Fosketh and Hesketh, 1997: 303).

Well, I had some friends that done it in college so they used to talk to me about it and mainly the rest it from me cos when I finished college I didn’t know what degree to pick. It was sort of a last minute thing. I just didn’t have a clue what I wanted to focus on at university. So I just read a bit about each degree they had going on at university. (Basra, 21, university student, female)

Postponement of career decision-making does not necessarily occur out of lack of interest, but can be strategic, in part, because contingent choosers anticipate that aspirations are underpinned by ‘interest’, which they ‘grow out of liking’. For others, career planning fails to go very far into the future not only because they lack the necessary socialisation or intergenerational guidance to facilitate the formation of ideas about their futures, but also because they tend to underplay the urgency of having to make plans for the future. As a result, plans for the future are simply left to the future, and there is an expectation that their tentative career aspirations in the words of Hibo ‘might just work out’. However, not to have a clearly defined career plan does not mean to lack ambition since there is a limit to what young people can anticipate in relation to their future career (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 1999: 239). What this means is that for some young people thinking in terms of contingencies is the most reasonable option to adopt, because of their limited horizons for action; they cannot adequately assess the implications of their choices for future actions. The range of career opportunities in the job market is unknown to most of them; they are driven by the pleasure of ‘doing what they enjoy doing’ as reflected, for example, in Hibo’s comments: ‘I really like journalism. It sounds interesting. I read about it’ (Hibo, 15, GCSE student, female).

The irony is that even though Hibo rationalises ‘doing journalism’ as the pursuit of furthering her career, she suspects it offers no tangible employment prospects. She aspires to train as a journalist; she has noted the mismatch between personal interest and employability. She acknowledges that employment prospects in journalism are limited in comparison to nursing, and yet consciously chooses it because ‘obviously you have to like the subject’, and reduces a career in nursing to a contingency plan: ‘if that [journalism] didn’t work out’. The notion of ‘interest’ as a key motive for many contingent choosers involves temporal dimensions. That is, contingent choosers can ‘grow out of liking it’ and invoke new ‘interest’ to give meaning to their evolving career biographies. For most young people like Hibo, interest-driven choices in relation to educational pathways are not necessarily linked with any specific career pathway in mind, but rather reflect one’s life stage. The temporality of ‘interest-driven choice’ means that interest loses its relevance for young people’s educational outcome and instead ‘opportunity’ becomes a key definer. Individual subjectivity and limited views of the likely outcomes mediate their choices.

I wanna work part-time just to get experience in the tourism sector so that when I leave university I have that experience. It will help me in getting a job. Just right now I am looking at possible career moves, jobs I wanna get when I finish university and start looking it. Right now ... thinking of what I wanna do Immigration Officer is one of them, also air traffic control, tourism in the airline industry, just them at the moment what I am thinking about, but obviously there is other stuff I would like to do as well. (Basra, 21, university student, female)

Furthermore, most young people, whether driven by immigrant optimism, or adolescent optimism or whether they are undecided about their futures, are driven by passion and interest in the subjects they choose. That said, interest on its own cannot be considered as reflecting young people’s contingent planning, for what has an impact is their agency. In the case of contingent choosers, like Hibo and Basra, their agency is imbued with ‘modesty in expectations’. Their narratives show that they have done some groundwork in relation to their futures, but are driven by tentative education plans and by their instrumental approach to their subject choices, i.e. to get the required grades.

[B]ecause the more GCSEs you have, the easier it is gonna be for you to be accepted by other schools. You know you’ve covered everything, all topics, all areas. (Hibo, 15, GCSE student, female)

Hibo and Basra's construction of their career identities seems to change with their social relationships, whereby they take on board advice from 'significant others' including family, friends, and professionals as and when it comes. Overall, the construction of their learner identities resonates with conformity and working hard and in contrast to Kaysar and Nasir, their learner identities can be described as strongly pro-education. In this respect, they show some similarities to idealistic choosers, but where they differ from the latter group is with regard to the tentativeness and modesty characteristic of their choice biographies and I would suggest that these characteristics are related to their age, agency, experience and the information available to them. For although these young people may 'aim high' in their expectations, they show modesty in their agency and reluctance to express positively their expected educational plans. That is, their agency is limited to claiming ownership of what is transmitted to them through teacher and family relationships. Despite their both being confident in their academic capabilities, they state their achievements modestly as 'just alright' and similarly also their agency. In addition to 'interest in the subject', which I argue is short-term oriented, the subject choices of young people in this category are informed by an instrumental rationality not in the sense of long term career plans, but in terms of immediate expected or required grades. Moreover, contingent choosers adjust their career aspirations as they progress in the education process, hoping to choose pathways that are more in tune with their longer term plans. However, the irony of this strategy is that, despite the changing nature of the choice-making process, contingent choosers do not take into account the implications of their choices for future ones, which bears witness to the fact that their interest-driven choices merely represent an enactment of tentative career aspirations. Katz and Martin (1962: 149) emphasise that career choice-making is a process that is 'largely irreversible', i.e. that decisions taken at key 'fateful moments' about educational pathways can be permanently consequential (Giddens, 1991: 142). According to Devadason:

Fateful moments are not simply the standard transitions towards adulthood that govern the direction of the life course, but any number of events of biological significance which have lasting implications for an individual's identity as well as their circumstances. (Devadason, 2007: 204)

Another theme in the accounts of contingent choosers is that they do not seek out strategic information to help get ahead with their career planning, as shown by the more ambitious, innovative choosers discussed in Chapter 6. Key themes in their accounts

include 'working hard' and 'reluctance to commit too much'. That is, interest-driven contingencies are more concerned with the immediacy of passion, and do not necessarily have significance for longer term career planning. Instead, what contingency planning shows is that the construction of career identity is an evolving process, and that expectations and aspirations are patterned and routinised by 'turning points' (choosing GCSE options or choosing a post-16 educational pathway, or meeting UCAS application deadlines and intervening exam results). So, while choosing subjects can be driven by instrumental motives, such as expected grades, or mediated by influences from parents, professionals and peers, when constructing their learner and career identities, contingent choosers remain open to eventualities. Unless pressed to explain how their immediate subject choices cohere with their longer term career aspirations, young people in this category do not talk about the primacy of choice-making, but about its urgency.

7.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the stories of young people whose accounts resonate with periods of uncertainty in the sense that they have no clearly defined career plans. I have suggested that their choice biographies are sometimes mediated by uncertainties in response to which they keep their options open. I have suggested that parents have some role to play in the emergence of these contingency strategies. They play a crucial role in this process, but their role is problematised in that instead of helping their children instrumentally navigate through the education system, they tend to unduly push their children forward without critical engagement with the prevailing opportunity structures. Contingency planning also shows that despite the rhetoric that educational and career choice-making appears to be 'a once and for all decision', it does not progress in a linear way and is never static, but it evolves and is characterised by defining turning points, risks and fluidity.

Chapter 8: Contextual Choosers

8.1 Introduction

Two overarching themes emerge from the previous two chapters. The first is the overwhelmingly pro-education attitude of the research participants and the second is that this positive attitude can be understood within the context of limited family cultural capital as a consequence of which Somali families struggle to affect the educational outcomes of their children. This chapter extends these themes by looking into how a third group of young people construct their choice biographies. I argue that with maturation young people become more nuanced, reflective and realistic in their expectations and opportunity-based in their outlook. The accounts of the young people I discuss in this chapter, those of contextual choosers, reveal that for them career choice-making begins to take a concrete shape after their first experiences with the opportunity structures. The narratives of these choosers show that realistic choice-making is shaped by the experiences of the employment market mediated by and often coinciding with obtaining a university qualification, or trying to find work without one. New experiences transform old expectations (Giddens, 1991), which gives rise to two responses: suspending futures or adjusting ‘capabilities to probabilities’ (Bourdieu, 1977) by embarking on new trajectories. For the discussion, I draw on the accounts of Anisa, Amina, Choukri, Badr, Adam, Abdirahman, Khadar, Jamal and Sahra. What these young people have in common is that they all have had experiences of the employment market, although to varying degrees. Some have completed a degree course, whilst others stopped their education after attending further education and one young person has had no formal education at all.

8.2 Future hanging in the balance

Aspirations do not necessarily always match abilities. For a variety of reasons, most of the young people discussed in this chapter were either employed in jobs with no prospects, or were not in education and had their hopes for the future hanging in the balance, thus having to adjust their aspirations. For example in the case of Jamal the first hurdle to his aspirations was that he did not qualify for his aspired educational and career pathway because of disappointing A-level grades:

[W]hen I was doing my A-levels I didn't know exactly what I would study... I was good in subjects, but I couldn't say like 'I am gonna study physics while I was at school', but after you reach A-levels and pass and you are happy you start

thinking ‘alright now I have the qualifications to go to university what am I gonna study?’ (Jamal, 25, unemployed, male)

Exam grades present young people with an opportunity to review their aspirations and reconcile them with what is realistically possible. In response to these hurdles, some become cautious and avoid committing themselves any longer to any course of action. Despite positive early experiences, Jamal’s progression in education faltered, and his plans for the future were prematurely disrupted by a combination of obstacles: he exhausted his learner identity, lost interest in the subject of science and was faced with financial difficulties, which were exacerbated by other ‘personal circumstances’. Like the contingency choosers discussed earlier, contextual choosers are cautious, but their cautiousness is more a response to real life experience of the labour market than an enjoyment of the present and the avoidance of an unknown future.

When I was newly arrived I had many hopes, but when I got to know things, I experienced subtle discrimination. For example if you want to apply for work they are more interested in what they benefit from you. They try to waste your time in education and mess up your university ambitions. (Badr, 23, unemployed, male)

I interviewed Badr with Aboukar (23) and Mahdi (22), who at the time I interviewed them were both new arrivals in the UK and whose story contained the immigrant optimism discussed in Chapter 6. For example, Mahdi’s initial experience in the UK is positive: ‘I have so far not experienced any problems’. He expects to start studying English very soon. Although he admits ‘it is too early for me to comment on life in the UK’, he remains optimistic about his future here, because, in his view, the realisation of personal objectives very much depends on individual efforts and motivation and he is confident he is not in short supply of these attributes. Like Aboukar, Mahdi recognises the existence of structural barriers, but in his view, again, these can be overcome by perseverance, motivation and hard work. Commenting on the views of Aboukar and Mahdi, Badr says ‘they are ambitious because they are new. I was ambitious too when I first arrived here’. For him, the expectations of the newcomers are simply illusory, because beneath the veil of perceived equality of opportunities loom trenchant inequalities and hidden barriers. He sees the problem with the newcomers as the pure innocent belief that the realisation of their wishes is merely one of sheer individual effort and motivation. Badr’s initial positive attitude and his dreams appear to have now eluded him. He shared that he has experienced what he described ‘hidden

discrimination' both in education and in employment and has lost faith in these institutions and shared that he was considering leaving the UK, although he had no concrete immediate plan in terms of for which country and when. He goes on to raise concerns about the fate of the Somali young people: 'The majority of those who are born here are in some way involved in the juvenile justice system'.

I think they can get something out of education and they, particularly the diaspora-born, will be able to get into the political system here. Like last year local elections there were three young Somali candidates to become MPs. I don't think we have political representation in the parliament like the Asian community, but I still think that in the coming ten years I have high hopes for those who want to remain in this country. (Badr, 23, unemployed, male)

It is interesting to observe that Badr, in his use of the phrase 'I have high hopes', continues to embrace his 'generalised optimism' when it comes to the future, yet feels stuck in the present. Similar experiences of 'feeling stuck', 'not knowing what to do next' and 'resignation' run through the accounts of some other young people like Anisa (a 23-year-old graduate job seeker), who had completed a degree in accounting and finance. In a few cases part of 'being stuck' is a personal choice, but in the case of most of the young people who had a positive experience of their early schooling, these positive experiences have been undone by negative experiences of the employment market that have led many of them to feel this way.

I picked the subject in college and plus I got keen on it cos my cousin was like in an accounting firm and she is an accountant now. So I just got interested through that. (Anisa, 23, graduate job seeker, female)

Bates argues that 'realistic career plans are only made when entry into the labour market becomes imminent' (Bates, 1993: 21). However, according to Furlong and Cartmel (1997: 107) 'the politics of self-actualisation is unlikely to thrive in an economic context characterised by uncertainty and high unemployment'. For example, in the case of Anisa it was after she had completed her studies and had a brief experience at an accounting firm that she realised what the requirements were to qualify as an accountant: 'It takes a couple of years to become an accountant and I wasn't like willing to become stressful with all them courses and all that'. Anisa has 'grown out of her interest' and justifies her opting out:

Because it is like, I don't know, it is like a doctor, innit? It takes a couple of years. By the time I finish I'll be like thirty to become an accountant. So I just did it because I liked the subject. (Anisa, 23, graduate job seeker, female)

The stories of the contextual choosers illustrate that transition from education to employment is much more subtle and complex than can be achieved through mere interest or effort. For the majority of the young people, concrete career planning informed by the opportunities available often take shape after gaining qualifications, for this is when they start to seriously think of 'what to do next'. Not only does opportunity-driven choice replace interest-driven aspirations, but more importantly, the effects of contextual factors take on a different meaning for these young people. Responding to structural inequalities, some become apathetic and critical of inequalities of opportunities, seriously question their position in the UK, begin to wonder about their identity and see their ethnicity within the '*othering*' discourse. These young people have 'exhausted their learner identities' (Ball et al., 2000: 135). It is clear from Anisa's account that her 'subjective aspirations' did not meet prevailing 'objective probabilities' (Bourdieu, 1977: 77). In response to barriers to employment, contextual choosers like her may decide to change direction, but they remain unsure about the next steps. At the time of the interview, Anisa, who had a business studies degree, had an unskilled job with no career prospects in a Tesco store and was considering teaching, but was putting barriers in the way of going forward with this: '[To] become a teacher, basically you need to have a degree, innit? There is, I don't think you can get a degree in teaching'.

Anisa reflexively thinks in terms of 'obstacles': entry requirements she is not even aware of, financial commitments she will be unable to raise, time commitments she cannot afford, and personal values she is not prepared to compromise by taking up an interest-based loan, which Muslims often see as an 'un-Islamic' practice. Given that these obstacles are difficult to avoid, she has suspended her future: 'I am just figuring out what I want to do'. Consciously, young people like her rule out certain career trajectories like banking: 'Like other part of me I did want to go into banking but I heard like banking is not good because of the interest and all that'. The invocation of faith to justify the ruling out of certain options as 'not for the likes of me' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 157) could be interpreted as a way of compensating for missing out on opportunities. The theme of 'feeling stuck' in the above examples is a manifestation of an aspiration/outcome differential. For some young people, it could lead them to become

realistic in their self-assessment, but it can also lead them to take a ‘fatalistic attitude’ towards the future (Ball et al., 2000: 48), i.e. ‘one of resigned acceptance that events should be allowed to take their course’ (Giddens, 1991: 112), where learner identities are dented and responses are indicative of ‘an absence of agency’ (Thomson et al., 2002: 342). This is particularly the case with Adam who resigns himself to seeking an explanation for his fate in his lack of luck:

The future is not in my hands. It is in God’s. I can plan the future, but it can turn out to be the other way around. Sometimes if you got luck on your side, you will succeed anyway you want, but as I said the future is not in my hands. I’m just gonna wait and see how it goes. (Adam, 24, casual worker, male)

Adam has accepted a life without education. From his account, ‘family processes’, peer pressure and life in the public care system seem to have contributed to his experiences of lack of education and involvement in negative youth subcultures. He explains his lack of engagement with the education process mainly in terms of lack of family support and is very critical of the role of fostering: ‘If I was a foster care and a social worker [brought] me [a] young person ... I’d try my best to help that person succeed in life, you know, show him the stuff that he doesn’t know... I never used to get that, you know’. His initial enthusiasm expressed in his excitement about ‘going to England’ has subsided because of the experiences he has had since:

I didn’t know what it will be when I arrived here, where I am gonna start from, what I am gonna do. If you know the system over [here], then you know where you’re going, what you doing, but if you don’t know it is confusing, isn’t it? It is really confusing. I arrived here young and experienced a lot at a young age, in Somalia as well, I grew up in the civil war. It was really hard either way. (Adam, 24, casual worker, male)

Contextual influences in the case of Adam have come from the fact that he was exposed to negative peer experiences and a lack of parental guidance. Thus, it can be seen that a strategy of suspending the future can come as a result of shattered immigrant optimism brought by contextual factors, such as ‘getting in with a bad crowd’. In most of the cases discussed so far, the role of negative peer influences was not significant, but Adam’s experiences are unique in my sample in the sense that he has not been in education since

arriving in the UK as an unaccompanied minor seeking asylum. His dreams have been shattered because in his words:

[M]eeting the wrong crowd you know, being on your own, you don't know what to focus on and once you mix with drugs and stuff as well it is not easy at all.
(Adam, 24, casual worker, male)

Opportunity structures can have effects similar to grades, capabilities and peer influences in that they dwarf the unbounded immigrant or age-related optimism. As far back as 1976, Bowles and Gintis pointed out that young people re-adjust their aspirations in the face of the reality of opportunity inequalities (Bowles and Gintis, 1976: 128). More recently, Roberts (2009: 356) notes that despite the role that individual agency can play in determining career destinations, available positions are limited, with the irony being that readjustments only reinforce the reproduction of existing inequalities. Confronted with the realities of structural inequalities, young people become overwhelmed by the realisation of the limitations of their individual agency and they increasingly lose confidence in the meritocratic values of education.

What the accounts of these young people show is that structural factors of social inequalities cast along the lines of 'race', social origin and class continue to determine the life-chances of young people from immigrant backgrounds. That is, these parameters continue to be a constitutive part of the social exclusion processes that drive young people from these communities away from mainstream channels of employment and into deprivation; even those with positive experiences of early schooling wake up to the impact of structural inequalities on their life chances. While a lack of qualifications means the absence of access to career opportunities, obtaining them does not necessarily entail automatic access to the employment ladder, because poor outcomes for young people from ethnic minority communities are the result of 'historic racism and prejudice against these groups' (Gillborn, 1990: 114). Moreover, for some young people contextual factors alienate them from more mainstream activities and hence they are driven into youth subcultures. Adam's experience shows that lack of education forecloses many opportunities, for unlike those with qualifications, he knows that his chances are limited, and accepts his lot of working as a casual labourer:

I work in a warehouse, but sometimes they send us to different places or ask us to do things they choose who they want to do whatever they want. That is what I do really. (Adam, 24, casual worker, male)

For some young people gaining a qualification seems to be an end in itself, not only because lacking one is considered as an open door to unemployment, but also because it is in itself an achievement. In fact, gaining a qualification is a 'rite of passage' associated with escaping from the trap of unemployment or underemployment, but having a qualification does not *per se* improve young people's chances of accessing the anticipated careers and in any case: 'a degree is the minimum requirement and it really is not more than that'. Bates (1993: 25) argues that, while young people go through complex processes of building their biographies and adjusting these as they progress through life, 'the basic parameters of choice are set by the labour market conditions' (Bates, 1993: 25). Hence, adjustment to the prevailing situation becomes necessary, yet as Gillborn (1990: 114) observes, 'the importance of educational certification for ethnic minority pupils should not be minimised, because without qualifications access to employment may not even be a possibility'.

In response to these differences in aspiration/outcome, graduates and twenty plussers start to renegotiate their aspirations by toning down their lofty expectations and their firm belief in the role of individual agency. These expectations and the tendency to write one's own biography early in life frustrate aspiration later on; a situation which leads many to put their futures on hold by avoiding making any further commitments. The implications of poor educational outcomes, then, not only lead to young people to losing faith in the fairness of educational and employment opportunities, but also in the meritocracy and the social mobility assumptions that this embodies. Ball et al., in their study of the post-16 experiences of a group of young people, argue that for these young people learning could be 'a necessity for achieving some kind of future' (Ball et al., 1999: 212), and that 'the relationships between learning and the self are utilitarian rather than affirmatory' (p. 212). Adam's plans included what every immigrant wants to achieve:

To support my family, really, that was my plan. All my family [is] in Somalia back home. I got a lot of brothers and sisters. My dad got married to four wives. It was to support my family and to make a better life for myself as well.

Intentionally, for me I wanted to go to education, go to school and when I finished school go to college and after that uni, but you know it did not happen ...
(Adam, 24, casual worker, male)

Adam's experiences resonate with those of some of the young people participating in Ball et al.'s (1999) study. Ball et al., found that some incorporate individual biographies and 'opportunity structures' to account for the fragmented nature of the construction of their learner and career identities. Moreover, they take for granted that gaining qualifications guarantees employment. As can be seen from Adam's case, under these circumstances the link between education and the labour market is absent, perhaps because of the lack of instrumental engagement with the education process at the family level, as discussed above. Key turning points of transition define these shifts and at each crossroads the young people develop new ways of understanding their situation. However, these shifts have temporal and spatial dimensions which are closely interlinked with the parameters of age, identity and belonging. Depending on their positioning in relation to these parameters, young people readjust their aspirations in the face of the reality of structural inequalities. They do so because they become aware of the implications of their prior choices for their employment opportunities, and of the workings of the employment market. In addition, with maturation the role of agency as the main driver of aspirations loses its motivating force, because young people start to realise that their educational outcomes are in the end constrained by an unfavourable youth employment market. Consequently, they respond to aspiration/outcome discrepancies by downsizing their aspirations to just getting-by. This idea of just getting a job to 'get-by', which is characterised by uncertainties, takes precedence over pursuing a desirable career. This shifting strategy means that it is only after gaining qualifications when young people become more realistic in their expectations, less enthusiastic in their aspirations and more concerned with just 'getting-by'. This 'getting-by' is captured by Anisa in her comment that she would settle for '[a] job ... first and foremost everyone wants obviously because everyone wants to make money'.

A job, I think, first and foremost everyone wants obviously because everyone wants to make money, but obviously everyone would like to have a career. You don't want to be stuck in a job that you don't like and you don't go through university and pay to get a degree just to be stuck in any job that anyone else can get with or without a degree. (Basra, 21, university student, female)

In her study of working-class girls, Bates (1993) noted that ‘individual capacities for adjusting their biographies in the light of labour market constraints played an important role’ (p. 29). She describes how girls going into the caring profession come to terms with it by rewriting their personal biographies in terms of their choices (Bates, 1993: 25). My data show similar findings. The irony is that such readjustment has further consequences for the reproduction of existing inequalities, for the experiences of contextual choosers can best be understood within the discourses of equality of opportunities. As Furlong (2009: 344) argues, despite the emphasis on the role of the individual, which the young people presented in the preceding discussion embody, ‘forms of consciousness may have changed, but people’s locations within power structures still strongly impact on life chances’. The transition to the world of work continues to be an everyday struggle for most young people, even more so for young people from immigrant communities. Writing in 1993 Bates (1993: 25) argued that ‘the hurdles of social background are more difficult to overcome in the context of the current tight job market where not only educational credentials but also their underlying social and cultural attributes are inevitably invoked into the selection processes’. This analysis is still relevant today and the role of social background in determining life-chances runs through Khadar’s narrative:

[T]hroughout primary school I went through various primary schools. In Year 2 and 3 I went to one school, and then another school. Then in Year 6 I changed school as well as in Year 5. So eventually I got to secondary school. Luckily, I went to the same secondary school for five years straight. We even moved areas which made it a lot harder in Year 10, but I still decided [to stay in the same school] because I didn’t want to disrupt my education. (Khadar, 22, university gap year student, male)

Khadar’s story of an unstable housing situation in his early years resonates with Bourdieu’s reproduction thesis in that his early life experiences of ‘moving around’ seem to have defined his experiences with his schooling. He managed to get into university, but started to struggle with his learner identity and decided to take a year out:

I had come back [from holiday] and I didn’t really have the motivation required for the final year of university. The final year of university is probably the

hardest year of education you ever do. It requires a lot of concentration, focus. You need to be hundred percent on. And I knew I wasn't hundred percent ready for it. So I thought 'take this year out while you have the chance'.

Khadar finds ways of justifying his decision to take a year out: '[m]y plan for this year is to work full time, help my mum with the bills around the house, but my main one is to get a car for transport'. His future hangs in the balance in that he is now undecided as to whether to resume his university degree course, or go into an apprenticeship. He states that he has already applied for one, but does not qualify, and so he has given up: 'I didn't bother chasing it up anymore'. When I interviewed him his immediate plan was 'to chase up the apprenticeship first and foremost, and secondly I shall be trying to network within work'. He is also contemplating to 'go straight into engineering rather than the academic', but continues to hold dear 'the thought of having a degree; it gives you that stamp of approval'.

The underlying reasons for the aspiration/outcome discrepancy are quite complex. This discrepancy presents young people with an opportunity to reflect, and researchers with a challenge, to explain why differentials in educational outcomes along class, gender and ethnicity persist. For young people from ethnic minority groups it is not so much competing with their peers in the education system as 'competing in the labour market' (Dale et al., 2002: 949) that divides the two groups and defines their differential educational outcomes. Discrepancies also indicate that although aspiration and expectation may drive young people to achieve, the main factors which eventually determine educational outcomes are structural and beyond their control. Clearly, Somali young people negotiate through an increasingly challenging labour market and do so with practically no support from their ethnic minority networks. Such a lack of social capital is illustrated in the case of Amina who is ambivalent about her job prospects in the law profession being commensurate with her qualification. Indeed, she appears to have chosen not to be so concerned about getting into the law profession she is so passionate about, and reluctantly accepts that attempts to do so amount to fighting a losing battle, because in the:

[L]egal sector ... many of the lawyers are homogenous ... They tend to be from a certain class, they tend to be certain ethnicity and gender as well: predominantly male, middle class, white and native English speakers. And they want to keep that

community as it is and they will put up barriers and obstacles to prevent other people to enter .. So it is a question of how you deal with those obstacles by yourself: Networking. I am now starting to realise the importance of making informal contacts... This happens back home and we call it 'nepotism', favouring your cousin, but it happens here and we are not aware that the host communities do exactly the same thing and we call it 'networking'. (Amina, 25, MA university student, female)

Through her statement 'it is who you know rather than what you know', Amina realises that educational outcomes are not merely allocated or achieved on a merit basis, because in her words 'a degree is the minimum requirement and it really is not more than that'. Her explanation for what she perceives as 'high unemployment rates' among Somali graduates resonates with the language of social capital, which she says is 'not given from our homes'. There is a general acceptance that Somali young people are at an increased risk of exclusion by the subtle process of alienating mechanisms including '*othering*' discourses in the curriculum and, in particular, unequal opportunity structures. In sum, although it would be far-fetched to attribute educational outcomes entirely to the social processes emanating from community relations, there is evidence that there is an impact at family and community levels.

Young people at risk of exclusion from mainstream activities owing to inequalities in opportunity respond in two ways. They either 'own up' to their alienation as 'fate' and 'individual failure', or they question the utility of education as a stepping stone into careers and with both these perspectives they re-evaluate their strategies for increasing their chances of getting into employment, which takes priority over developing a career. As they mature, young people either become frustrated, suspend their hopes and their aspirations and become less ambitious or they persevere, using their acquired life experiences to adjust their plans. Those with enough perseverance realise that the parameters of 'having a potential', 'interest' and 'effort' are only a small subset of the multitude of the factors that shape their choice biographies, for outcomes and life-chances are determined by a completely different set of contextual factors. One of the main reasons for the suspension of their futures is because aspirations do not always follow interest or capabilities.

8.3 Managing to make it

Against all the odds some young people manage to make it. This is the case with Sahra (25) who is a social worker, Choukri (23) who will soon qualify as a teacher and Abdirahman (25) who is a youth worker. These three have managed to get a job they call a profession. They have responded to the aspiration/outcome differential by self-reliance, critical agency, flexibility and networking. They embrace the challenges of structural factors; they find ways of negotiating opportunity structures. Those who are driven by opportunities, reflexively engage with their aspirations according to the available opportunities. Their stories show the role of perseverance in finding a niche between their capabilities and their probabilities of getting onto the employment ladder. The relatively positive outcomes of this small minority of young people like Sahra, Abdirahman and Choukri, are grounded in critical agency, immigrant optimism and a degree of flexibility. That is, although their narratives include episodes of ‘thinking in terms of contingencies’, and acknowledge realisation of aspiration/outcome discrepancies, they have started to engage in ‘learning society’ discourses, where the focus is on ‘a concern with upskilling, reskilling and labour market needs’ (Ball et al., 2000: 59).

I wanted to utilise my degree in some way. So when I looked into social work it was not something I ever considered doing. I never wanted to attend anything to do with that profession, but when you complete your degree and you are unemployed for two months and it is difficult to find something you will consider anything worthwhile to apply. I was also getting pressure from my family to get any job; they were asking ‘why you do not get unskilled manual job while you wait or work in a call centre ... and save some money and wait until your break comes?’, but I was not willing to do that. (Sahra, 25, social worker, female)

Career choice can sometimes be serendipitous, but this serendipity is often mediated by networking, agency and a certain level of flexibility. During the idealistic and contingent stages, young people’s construction of their career identities is not necessarily embedded in available employment opportunities as it is more likely to be driven by individual dispositions and family influences. Contextual choosers, in contrast, are more focussed on the immediacy of finding a foothold in the labour market and to this end they link their qualifications to the employment opportunities available. At this stage they become reflective and question the instrumental values of educational credentials to secure social

mobility. Those who manage to keep their learning identities intact through ‘up-skilling, re-skilling’ or changing directions are able to respond to labour market demands (Ball et al., 2000: 147). The accounts of contextual choosers show that their prior choices, like nearly all those discussed earlier, are driven by individual ‘purely interest-based’ motives, but not instrumental ones, in the sense that their choices are specifically targeted to a particular role, because given their age are not very concerned about the implications of their choices for future prospects.

I did a three year degree in English language and linguistics and this is when I basically started to think about what I really wanted, because at the end of my first year I was offered a job through my friend of basically becoming an English tutor. And I needed a part time-job anyway because I was at uni. So, I was like ‘Oh yeah, my passion’. I enjoyed it. That is when I started to get passion and interest for teaching and this is when I started to think about: ‘Hey! You know what, you can actually be a teacher’ and that was not in my mindset up until that stage. (Choukri, 23, PCGE student, female)

Choukri’s response is achieved through networking and through human agency. For to capitalise on the opportunities available has required her to maintain an open attitude towards those emerging opportunities and more importantly to keep her learner identity or her immigrant optimism intact as well as being willing to adjust her aspirations to what is available. She has started to think through the ‘learning society’ discourse and continues to explain that her teaching experience has further opened her up to alternative plans and ambitions for the future:

I worked with children with special needs and that is an area now, now that I’ve experience in it, I really wanna pursue. And there is another thing, because you know we were watching Somali TV me and my Mum the other day. And she was basically telling me, how there is not really like, this is something I really would love in Somalia is set up a special needs school, because my Mum was telling me, we were watching together anyway, and there was children they all got autism, some of them ADHD, some of them blind, physical impairment and they wanted to enter the educational arena., but there is obviously in Somalia, you

know it is difficult... I now want to go into it or set up school in Somalia or help set up schools here. (Choukri, 23, PCGE student, female)

Although this account could be described as a ‘post hoc rationalisation’ (White, 2007: 51), the point here is that with maturation young people become reflective about their choices. Some contextual choosers reposition themselves to find a new fit between their capabilities and their probabilities. They draw on individual biographies in this repositioning, but also tend to be more instrumental in their approach to opportunities by drawing on their social contacts.

Basically, I chose to study a BA degree in business management... What made me choose it was because I’ve always been interested in business ... So it’s something that I was just inspired to do and it still is something that even now I am slightly, in terms of my career where I ended up, is slightly different to what I studied as a degree... Although it is not really related to what I studied, but I still aspire to one day start my own business... Even the role that I am doing now I see in a lot of ways it helps me because the report writing, the research, you know a lot of stuff basically I’ve learned that I found useful to what I’m doing now. (Abdirahman, 25, youth worker, male)

However, managing aspiration in the face of an unaccommodating opportunity structure requires a certain level of resilience and sacrifice. For example, Sahra resisted the financial and social pressures of getting into jobs without prospects and managed to avoid falling into the trap of unskilled jobs, choosing to wait ‘until her break comes’ and considering her unemployment as merely temporary. In her view, unskilled jobs may offer immediate cash, but in a subtle way undermine aspirations more than temporary unemployment does. Although one can argue that career outcomes are sometimes serendipitous, i.e. defined by opportunities, spotting opportunities themselves requires a keen eye. In other words, to spot an opportunity one needs to look for it: ‘I just thought I just needed to do something’. Sahra was alerted by a friend to a sponsored MA in social work opportunity. As with Abdirahman, Sahra had no concrete post-16 career plan and her early views regarding this remained ‘contingently’ defined. Those who are well connected have a better chance of gaining instrumental knowledge about job opportunities.

Sahra, Abdirahman and Choukri's journeys towards an unexpected career outcome attests to the serendipity of such outcomes and the fact that immigrant optimism lives on, for these young people have retained quite a strong sense of agency, ready to challenge stereotypes around jobs, gender and social expectations. For example, in hindsight, Sahra found the course insightful, but bemoaned the fact that her family constantly questioned the 'market-value' (Foskett and Hesketh, 1997) of her choice by comparing it to the more familiar engineering course her brother was doing and her sister's midwifery course, which in her mother's view offered better career prospects. She remembers that she was constantly pressured on account of her choice. Hence, while she regards her mother as her close mentor, there have been times when she has had to counter her views:

At one point I did not want to get married nor have children. I wanted to go to the top, the highest position possible. I would not say that I have become realistic, but my priority has changed. I think it was influenced more towards my religion. Because of that I do not see that as a priority. (Sahra, 25, social worker, female)

The individualisation of choice biographies as promoted by the schooling curriculum and neoliberal education policy is in stark contrast to the normatively mediated choices common in ethnic minority communities. The rhetoric of neoliberal policies in which the individual is discursively positioned as solely responsible for their outcomes, does not explain why poor educational outcomes among social and ethnic minority groups continue to persist. The evidence of this research shows that the individual identity much celebrated in the individualisation thesis of the neoliberal policies as a key parameter for mediating outcomes makes way for contextually determined ones (Avis, 2006; Furlong, 2005). That is, the shift from idealistic to realistic choice-making coincides with increased awareness of contextual influences and the individual's social position within that context (Ball et al., 2000). However, in a few cases, the dynamics of agency and immigrant optimism have survived the constraints of adverse contextual influences.

Young people's accounts of 'parental over-expectations' despite discrepancies between subjective expectations and objective realities is a reminder of the lack of available instrumental information about potential possibilities. As a result, the young people appear to make choices in 'a vacuum of information' (Foskett and Hesketh, 1997: 304). Foskett and Hesketh argue that a lack of parental information has 'negative

ramifications' (p. 304) for children's educational outcomes, which raises critical questions about the role of immigrant parents in their children's transition through the UK education system. Although information and the meaning younger people attach to it is age-related, full information about all possible options is never complete, and decisions are often made with some degree of uncertainty. Some young people, particularly those driven by 'ambition, passion and interest', are eager to acquire insights that help them make informed choices. Talking to someone from the profession they aspire to, is a real life example and reassuring. In contrast to the younger idealistic choosers, who are not able to judge the quality of the limited information available through lack of experience, some contextual choosers engage reflectively with their experiences of contextual factors and start re-focussing their career choices. They do so for example through networking, which can extend their knowledge base.

Information as constitutive of the context of choice is necessary for realistic choice-making. Here family, friends or the community share information on the complex education system and job market. Information shared through these channels is connected to the intergenerational transmission of values, norms and worldviews, which as discussed earlier, underlies much of the pro-education attitude. Equally important is the information accessible through professional 'information gatekeepers', such as teachers and career advisors (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 1999: 235), who filter the nature and quality of the information young people have access to. That is, such information is expected to help the young with strategic decision making, thereby enhancing the life chances of this generation.

8.4 Conclusion

In some respects the stories of the young people presented in this chapter could be seen as concluding the journey young people make to plan their futures. I have suggested that this journey starts with a phase characterised by over-ambition. Early in their lives most young people adopt a more rigid approach towards setting their life goals. They tend to assume they will achieve these goals through mere personal effort and their choice biographies are characterised by strong self-belief and optimism. These strong agential tendencies partly reflect their stage in the life course. However, life experiences that often come with maturation transform these early expectations and 'make way for new ones'. For post-16 choices are not static, but evolve over time as young people continually revise their plans and reflectively make adjustments. In this sense, choice-making is in part based on the meaning the developing young people attach to the

information they possess about the labour market. That is, as new information becomes available, they change their courses of action. This changing pattern of aspirations appears to reflect age, experience and sense of agency of the young person, because meaning-making is associated with age and life stage. Often, the younger they are the more pronounced their aspirations and expectations, but as they mature and are confronted with the conflicts and contradictions of the prevailing opportunity structures their expectations become moderated by contextual factors that affect their outcomes. They start to engage reflectively with the employment market and doubt the existence of equality of opportunities, with these new experiences being much more fundamental and personal than they could have thought previously. Consequently, they begin to adjust their subjective expectations to opportunities that are objectively available and some start cashing in on these by re-skilling or up-skilling and by self-redefinition. Finally, the changing patterns of aspirations presented in the preceding three chapters reflect the situational character of choice, and more importantly the constraints of the immigrant dream as a key definer of the pro-education attitude shown by the Somali young people.

Chapter 9: Discussion and Conclusions

9.1 Introduction

This thesis has been concerned with two interrelated questions: first, it has focused on exploring how Somali young people construct their educational and choice-making biographies; and second, it has addressed the matter of the extent to which issues of identity and belonging, pre-migration histories and dynamics in the Somali community shape these constructions; and following on from this it has examined and explained how far negotiating normative expectations, structural constraints and personal preferences shape these young people's educational and career orientations as well as their outcomes. This final chapter revisits these central questions and pulls together the key themes emerging from the data analysis. As has been argued throughout this thesis, the formation of choice biographies is a complex process in which the structural and the personal meet, mediate, confront and inflect each other in multiple ways. The construction of choice biographies is to begin with, mediated by the dynamics in the Somali community and further driven by individual ambitions, but tends to be finally – or in the last instance as Althusser (1971) would say – determined by prevailing structural conditions. In this chapter, I also discuss the practical implications of this research: a) for understanding the social mobility of Somali diaspora young people in the UK in other countries in the West where Somalis have come to resettle, and b) for future research.

9.2 Somali community dynamics

I started my data analysis by mapping out the Somali community context within which the young people interviewed have engaged with the educational opportunities available to them. This emerging community is undergoing substantial changes, while at the same time trying to maintain its cultural heritage. To make sense of these community dynamics, I have drawn on the social capital perspectives as discussed in Chapter 2. In that chapter, I suggested that community processes, including histories, changes and what Coleman (1988) calls 'soft variables', such as relations, norms and values, have profound influences on the formation of the choice biographies of young people from ethnic minority communities. That is, I found that these community dynamics and values mediate young people's attitudes and choices either directly through community networks or indirectly through their influences on family processes. In this thesis I have argued that the challenges young people of this community face are not merely individual problems, but problems affecting the wider Somali community.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the common problems stemming from the marginalisation the community faces do not necessarily evoke a common response to address these. That is, the idea of 'community' has become problematised and consequently its constituent parts of kinship, identity, language, culture and shared history, as a framework for explaining relations among members of the Somali community, have had to be unpacked. I have shown that the unproblematic deployment of the concept of 'community' in its totalising sense conceals the complexity of the dynamics of social relations among members of this community. As outlined in Section 4.3, the necessity to form a common front is among the Somali community fraught with a centripetal/centrifugal dialectic. This dialectic relationship involves the pressure to join forces to 'muscle their way up' (Feglerud and Engebrigsten, 2006: 1120) by challenging the experiences of unemployment, discrimination and the risk of social exclusion in the racialised UK context on the one hand, and the tendency to form exclusive networks with no collective political representation in the host country, on the other. This tension has been shown as being closely associated with the historical and political developments in the country of origin.

To make sense of the narratives of my research participants, I focussed on the continuities/discontinuities of their cultural, linguistic and historical heritage; the struggle endured; and the strategies employed in response to the challenges they face and their chances for self-betterment in the host society. The findings from this study indicate that Somali community dynamics are shaped by questions surrounding the very process of change pertaining to citizenship in the adopted country and the emotional attachment to the country of origin. It has emerged that as part of managing cultural and linguistic discontinuities there has recently been among the Somali community organisations a shift in focus regarding the services they provide, with the new orientation being towards permanent settlement in the UK. Within this shift, investment in education and the preservation of cultural heritage as a way of monitoring their children's incorporation into the host society, have taken centre stage among the first generation Somalis, as they want to have it both ways, as it were. That is, on the one hand, they want their children to retain their cultural and linguistic heritage as well as maintain links with their country of descent, while on the other, they hope to see them participate positively in the socioeconomic and political processes in the host country. This wanting to have it both ways, which forms 'different ends of the same continuum'

(Sampson and Groves, 1989: 777), can be understood in terms of segmented assimilation theory (Zhou, 1997), as has been discussed in the literature review chapter.

Such a characterisation of Somali community relations merits further qualification. At the core of the centripetal/centrifugal tension is the idea of 'trust'. It can be argued that the generation of trust is perhaps less problematic in the domains of religion than in mobilising community resources for gaining political representation in the host country and in shaping the educational outcomes of the younger generation of the community. In particular, Somali community organisations in the diaspora are able to raise funds from within the community towards the establishment of mosques. The role of religion in community relationships remains significant, but only in so far as its organising utility is limited to the places of worship, for outside these, it plays a less significant role in fostering a sense of a cohesive community. Hence, trust in the domain of collective interest among the different sections of the Somali community appears to be problematic.

Shared culture, history, collective migration narratives and past experiences are often expected to mediate the construction of collective consciousness in the Durkheimian sense, and facilitate the participation of the individual in collective actions. Their shared commonalities are essentialised and these communities are lumped together as one group, being presented as intrinsically cohesive while their diversities are driven to the background. Moreover, entrenched stereotypical assumptions about 'visible' immigrant communities underpin their frequent portrayal and perception as communities from traditional societies wishing to join liberal societies. As a result, studies on differential educational outcomes of young people from different racial or social groups have often drawn on perspectives informed by either culturalism or structuralist-functionalism. These perspectives have offered explanations for differences in the transition of young people from minority ethnic groups based on such factors as attitudes, value orientations and outlooks that shape aspirations (Vermeulen and Perlman, 2000). However, deploying these analytical frameworks for the study of the Somali community needs to be better contextualised. For, against the backdrop of the particularities of the Somali community, it has been argued that one should be careful not to lump together members of this community as a coherent group. This is because the migration biographies of first generation Somalis resettling in the UK, even where they were the result of the same push factor (i.e. political conflict in the country of origin), have different meanings to

different segments of this community. In fact, one can argue that the formation of community organisations has tended to make visible some of the previously invisible differences among the Somali community. The accounts presented in this thesis have shown that there is tension between the urgency to mobilise community resources for common interests and the centrifugal tendency to form alliances along kinship lines. What draws Somalis together for mobilising collective action is, then, not the common challenges they face in life in the host society, but their sharing of clan affiliations and therefore, in practical terms it remains an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1983).

Consequently, to some people, ‘Somali’ identity has become contentious and loaded, and they reject its totalising political connotations, while to others it is heritage that should be embraced. Taking different connotations and rendered less significant by reconfigured regional and kinship identities, a new identity is emerging which is fragmented and transnationalised through kinship relationships, but devoid of a shared meaning of community consciousness. That is, in its place, kinship logic has come to define much of the community relations. Thus, one can argue that ‘collective Somali identity’, as an organising concept, has been rendered problematic by the re-enactment of pre-migration narratives. That is, its cohesive role for collective interest is contested because it is weakened by the association of some aspects of it (i.e. kinship-based social organisation) with the conflict in the country of origin. From this perspective, it is suggested that there is not much investment in what is collectively shared, not least because there is not much involved and hence, there is fierce competition over what there is. This individual/community tension is captured in the economic rational aphorism that people are often motivated by the pursuit of individual interest. One can suggest that historically members of the Somali community tended to be individualistic in a different sense too, for it has been argued that historic nomadic life in the country of origin does not foster a sense of collectivity. Collective ethos that binds Somali nomadic people then are often arranged and maintained by kinship relationships than territorially defined. In a sense, the ambivalent social relations shown by my data can be seen to be reflective of these cultural repertoires inherent in the historic nomadic way of life of the Somali people, which is marked by a high degree of individualism (Fuglerud and Engebriksen, 2006). However, this is not to reduce immigration to individualisation or to suggest that all immigrants are essentially individualists, for immigrant communities may share more similarities than their differences with the host community.

The accounts presented in this thesis also suggest that shared commonalities, such as history, language and ethnic origin, in so far as people draw on them, are merely virtues born out of necessity, and a response of resistance to the ‘*othering*’ of ethnic minority groups by the mainstream society. In this sense, the urgency to form a community could perhaps then be described as a way of seeking recognition in the face of threats of marginalisation and exclusion, while at the same time it could be a way of meeting individual needs for what Giddens (1991) calls ‘ontological security’. The concerns raised about the participation of ethnic minority communities in the mainstream society, then, do not result from their unwillingness to integrate, but from the power relations inherent in the ways in which minority ethnic communities participate in the majority mainstream society. A good example is the emergence of ethnic minority neighbourhoods, resulting from both the departure of white families from these neighbourhoods and the attraction of incoming ethnic minority people through existing networks (Warikoo, 2011).

9.3 Intergenerational dynamics, emerging transnationalism and identity

I have argued that the dynamics in the emerging Somali community are defined by changes, continuities and differential participation in the socioeconomic process in the host country. These dynamics generate what Portes and Rumbaut (2001) call ‘intergenerational dissonance,’ which has implications for the ways in which Somali young people engage with opportunities. Clearly, the very process of ‘change’ evokes responses of resistance from the first generation and creates tension, because the second generation may not share these concerns, wanting to live out their subjectivities. For many families, education becomes a field where a negotiated solution is reached to the problem of intergenerational dissonance.

A key development associated with the community dynamics is the shift among this community towards more permanent residency in the UK. The findings of this research have demonstrated that the presence of the Somali immigrant community is changing from a temporary sojourn to one of more permanent residency, although a substantial section of the community are increasingly becoming transnational migrants. One of the key factors underlying this process of transnationalism is the role of young people’s coming-of-age in the diaspora. As they mature, they assume more responsibility for their futures, particularly in relation to their identity and sense of belonging. This research has revealed that the maturing children are having a profound impact on their parents’

orientation towards the adopted country to the extent that the latter are suspending or even abandoning their plan of return to the country of origin. That is, instead of working on their return dreams, the parent generation is now dealing with the emergent problems of their children's coming-of-age under increasingly challenging circumstances.

With this shift, the parent generation has become increasingly concerned about its participation in the adopted country, and consequently much emphasis is now being placed on education, not only as a vehicle for social mobility, but also as way of managing the changes implicated in the adaptation process. Indeed, with this shift there is a continuous struggle to maintain cultural identity and to ensure continuity. Along with more permanent residency in the UK, the findings suggest that the 'immigrant wish to return' has not been completely abandoned by all, but rather that it is paralleled by an increasing transnationalism. The process of transnationalism refers to an immigrant's sense of belonging to dual or multiple homelands, and having what Werbner (2013) calls 'double consciousness'. That is, through extensive transnational networks some immigrants mobilise resources to remain linked with their country of origin, either through financial support for relatives, or by engagement with the political processes, thereby contributing to the reconstruction of their country of origin. In her study of British Pakistani women shuttling between Britain and Pakistan, Werbner (2013) argues that the problem with transnationalism is that it creates the 'illusion of continuity', and little do immigrants realise that with time transnational 'cultural disjunction' takes its toll. Here, Werbner points out that on arrival 'counter-diasporic returnees' find themselves to have become as much foreigners in their ancestral country as they are in their adopted one, because 'they have made history and memory elsewhere' (p. 43). In a similar fashion, Somali community dynamics are shaped by the subtle transformations they face in their daily lives in the diaspora.

A key marker of the shift towards the more permanent residency is the burgeoning 'place-making', which Gill (2010: 1157) defines 'as a way for migrants to forge collective identity'. However, it has been noted that there are intergenerational differences in this place-making process. It has been found in this research regarding this, that community centres run by Somali organisations are not *per se* spaces for consolidating collective solidarity and neither are they popular among the diaspora-born/raised young people. A community centre, as a phrase, would normally evoke resonance with collectivities and a social space where members of a certain group come

together, interact, socialise and exchange information, thereby fulfilling an 'integrative function' (Glover, 2004: 66) as the hub of cultural activities promoting the emergence of community social capital. However, in the case of the Somali community it has transpired that community centres are not necessarily places where shared culture, histories or national identities are fostered, because these parameters have over the recent period become more polarised. This is in spite of the fact that there is formal recognition that these objectives constitute these centres' remit. In reality, their function is often limited to the provision of services, such as information, education (Koranic studies and after school clubs) and interpreting. The unpopularity of community centres perhaps is indicative of the rejection of the collectively driven intentions embedded in the notion of such community organisations.

However, community centres are only part of the wider 'immigrant place-making' (Gill, 2010), which can also include shopping centres, cafés and mosques. These spaces are places for the construction, reproduction and maintenance of native culture. The difference, however, is that with these spaces it is the individual behaviour that maintains their collective functionality. It is this kind of collective place-making that is driven by 'the invisible hand of community', i.e. 'the power of community in binding individuals to act for the collective good' (Lejano and Fernandez de Castro, 2014: 75). This process of geographical place-making can 'afford for immigrants political leverage in their struggle for recognition' (Gill, 2010). However, the picture is more complicated, because such Somali community place-making as a response to the hostile host society they have come to join may be all that is achieved, for it does not necessarily translate into community cohesion. Thus, one should not confuse this form of collective behaviour driven by what Lejano and Fernandez de Castro (2014: 75) call the 'selfish gene to maximise their chances of survival' in a hostile alien society, with the collective arrangements facilitated by community organisations. Following Gill (2010), I suggest it is this kind of residential concentration that in part contributes to the Somali community being considered as a coherent one; besides, there is a common perception among members of this community that voluntary organisations embody the divisive kinship social arrangement. The problem of the lack of cooperation is not necessarily only a 'tragedy of the commons' (Lejano and Fernandez de Castro, 2014), but as has been argued throughout this thesis, it is the re-enactment of practices brought over from the native country that continue to shape community relations. Most of what is commonly shared, including cultural, linguistic and ethnic heritage, is rendered problematic by

differential experiences of the context of departure from the native country and these have implications for the idea of 'trust', which forms the basis around which cohesive community relations often revolve.

These community dynamics have ramifications for the complexity of young people's transition processes and for their self-positioning in the wider multicultural society. For example, with some young people the community paradoxes have led them to adopt unbounded geographical belongingness. This emergence of a diaspora identity is closely related to the processes of change and continuity that mark the construction of educational and career aspirations, which also shape the emergence of transnationalism among the Somali community. However, young people do not share these concerns. Their responses to questions on identity are more diverse, with most of them not necessarily expressing their daily experiences in the 'moral panic' discourses of alienation common among the community workers/parent-generation and not considering their community membership relevant to their daily lives. On the contrary, Somali young people born or raised in the diaspora, particularly those less incorporated into their Somali community networks, tend to emphasise individual uniqueness in the neoliberal discourses of identity. They shrug off the relevance of native cultural heritage for their daily lives, and instead, are more pragmatic in their search for meaning and belonging to make sense of their histories, current circumstances and futures.

Related to this form of self-identification is engagement with education in view of life in the adopted country. That is, for this particular group the idea of 'country of descent' is only of marginal importance and ethnic/national identity is not necessarily significant; they do not describe themselves as Somalis *per se* simply because 'they simply are'. Such ethnic minority identity is underplayed as self-evident, and if the idea of identity is a reification of ethnic/racial origin, then most young people do not see why such a self-evident question needs to be asked, let alone answered. However, if it gives scope for self-expression, then those in this category emphasise their multicultural identity, which is an embodiment of a fluid and more inclusive multidimensional citizenship. Accordingly, against this backdrop I differentiated in Chapter 5 between three overlapping modes of self-identification: circumstantial, cosmopolitan and Muslim. The Somali 'ethnic' identity stands to varying degrees in hyphenated relations to each of these types of self-identification. The 'circumstantial' identity involves an expression of an ethnic Somali identity in the host society and an act of resistance to the *pathologising*

practices (Archer, 2008) inherent in the hegemonic values of the dominant host culture. With this type of identity, young people consider their presence in the UK as temporary and 'circumstantial'. That is, they have developed a form of 'diaspora identity' that treats their belonging to the diaspora as merely a product of forced migration. Consequently, young people of this type maintain emotional links with the country of descent and their engagement with education in the UK is driven by a wish to contribute to developments in that country (see Chapter 6).

For the majority of the Somali young people, identity is not a given attribute. It reflects their tendency to view themselves as constructing a distinct individual identity, which to some extent reflects the current discourses of identity. In this view, identity is not only fluid, but also offers the possibility for self-positioning. For the diaspora-born/raised young people identity is, as with choice/aspiration, an individual matter and they remain unmoved about the concerns raised by the parent generation, not seeing anything 'Somalian' about their individual situations. In contrast, recent arrivals, those who arrived in the UK as young adults, strongly position themselves within the collectivities of 'Somali/ness', and are critical of the fluidity of identity adopted by the diaspora-born/raised, expressing the view that these young people have missed out on their cultural becoming. That is, for most of the diaspora-born/raised young people there is much emphasis on individual identity as opposed to the more collective identity of the recent arrivals. One cannot, therefore, discuss the process of the construction of a national identity among Somali young people without reference to their interaction with members of the Somali community outside their immediate families.

It has emerged that the critical agency of the young people is manifested in their role in the changing orientation of their families towards resettlement in the UK. The data analysis indicates that identity and belonging are interrelated with the assumed citizenship in the adopted country. It has been shown that, parallel to the process of engagement with education, there is among the Somali community in the diaspora a process of resettlement in the host country. In contrast to the overwhelmingly positive attitude shown by most of the younger respondents, there is among the key informants from community organisations some ambivalence. On the one hand, they raised concerns about the educational outcomes of the Somali youth as well as cultural and linguistic discontinuities, with most acknowledging that the Somali community currently faces 'tough times'. However, on the other hand, despite their trepidation, there is

among these leaders a sense of a positive outlook towards the future, and a feeling that, with time, the community will catch up with mainstream society. This depiction of the unknown future in a positive light is a form of coping strategy to deal with uncertainties in the host country.

These views on identity raise critical questions about the utility of ‘community’ as a ‘signifier’ (Hall, 1996) of Somali young people’s choice biographies. For most of them participation in a community is just another way of achieving personal goals and because they are confident that these can be achieved through individual means, they feel that the idea of community has no meaningful utility for them. Such a view being taken by them is further problematised by the general lack of a sense of community among the Somali immigrants and their offspring. The idea of ‘community membership’ simply as a means to achieve individual aims can be explained not only in terms of economic rationality, but also in terms of late modernity discourses, particularly in relation to the formation of identity and subjective self-positioning. In line with this, young people in contemporary times tend to write their own individual biographies. Understood within these discourses, relations between the diaspora-born/raised and their first generation immigrant counterparts are marked by intergenerational dissonance, whereby the young have become critical of the social relationships among the Somali community, rating the benefits of community participation as marginal to their daily lives. It is these changing intergenerational dynamics that, this research suggests, are contributing to the shift towards permanent residency in the diaspora.

To understand the processes of identity construction by young people, it is necessary to take into account the historical and pre-migration narratives of the Somali community. My study has revealed that this process among the Somali young people has in part been facilitated by community links through which the parent-generation have shared cultural narratives, fostered commonalities and have shared strategies for managing the children’s incorporation into the host country. I have suggested that the polarisation of relations among the Somali community has a bearing not only on the intergenerational transfer of values and norms, but also on the formation of an overarching Somali ‘national’ identity. That is, kinship-based social practices continue to undermine the emergence of a shared identity while the on-going political instability in the country of origin continues to undermine the emergence of a common Somali identity. Such continuity of historic social practices in the diaspora has ramifications for the way

Somali young people discursively position themselves in the wider context of the host society. Their identity is entangled with life-chances through subjective self-positioning and participation in objective opportunity structures in the host society, which has some bearing on their social mobility. In other words, identity reflects and is reflected in their views toward their futures. As discussed in the literature review chapter, ethnic minority identity as a form of social capital inhering in community relations can be mobilized for fostering positive engagement with education (Coleman, 1988). The findings have indicated that Somali young people, despite their many shared commonalities, can better be understood in the context of individual discourses as reflective agents in a constant struggle to break away from the imposed commonalities inherent in the Somali identity. Further, migration adds an additional dimension to this already complex and contested identity and the way diaspora young people engage with the processes of transition to adulthood. Thus, in addition, the contextual dynamics of the receiving society can lead to differential conceptions of citizenship in the host culture.

9.4 It is all about education now: a renewed focus on education?

The process of resettlement in the host country described earlier runs parallel to how the Somali community's engagement with education plays out. The renewed focus on education reflects the fact that, despite the gradual realisation of the possibility of non-return to the home country, there is, among the Somali community, a realisation about the lack of proper investment in their stay in the UK, which has become an impetus for an even closer engagement with the education process. It has emerged from the data analysis that children have a profound impact on their parents' orientation towards the adopted country to the extent that some have suspended or even abandoned their plan of return to the country of origin. That is, instead of working on their return dreams, the parent generation is now dealing with the emergent problems of their children growing up in increasingly challenging circumstances. It is here that the self-betterment goals underlying the migration process are re-enacted. The adaptation problems Somalis face reflect their resettlement process and the duration of their stay in the UK. It has been noted that with the shift towards longer term residency in the host society there is among the parent generation a continuous struggle to sustain cultural identity, ensure continuity and manage changes implicated in the adaptation process (cf. Chapter 4). However, although as suggested Somali children in the diaspora are becoming change agents in their parents' orientation towards the adopted country, it is equally important to note that their incorporation into the host society is reciprocally mediated by the parent

generation's efforts to ensure continuity of the community's cultural heritage. In sum, the contextual conditions of the host society not only offer opportunities for immigrant communities to better their lives, but they also pose critical challenges.

The accounts presented in this thesis have highlighted that both the intrinsic and instrumental values of education in facilitating social mobility are held in high regard by the Somali community. These values, inherent in the logic of migration, are transmitted through family processes. This happens in two main ways. First, values and norms constitutive of the migration narratives of the first generation, i.e. the view that opportunities are much more limited in the country of origin, are leading them to take a positive normative stance towards the education that they impart to their children. This process explains much of the pro-education *habitus*, which Somali young people exhibit. Positive engagement with the education process, to an extent, reflects 'immigrant optimism' and can be described as an embodied coping mechanism. It resonates with what Sayad (2004: 26) calls the 'idealised vision of emigration as a source of wealth'. I have suggested that parents as first generation immigrants have been playing a central role in fostering a positive attitude towards education as well as guiding their children through the complex education system, and when they are unable to provide guidance, they put pressure on them to achieve (cf. Chapter 6). As bearers of family dreams, most Somali young people respond positively to these parental expectations.

Second, there is pressure on the family to maintain its position in the community. In Chapter 6, I have argued that the development of attitudes towards education has a social context in which the family, its history and resources play a role (Fukuyama, 1993; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). Both the geographical dislocation and the structural conditions in the new host country have led to increased pressure on these families to preserve their cultural identity, while at the same time they have had to establish themselves in the host society, which has not only offered opportunities, but also posed challenges. My data show that in many ways the Somali community is at a critical juncture in their stay in the UK. In Chapter 4, I have highlighted that members of this community are starting to realise that their stay in the host society is becoming more permanent and I have differentiated two interlinked themes underlying this shift. First, I suggested that the Somali children maturing in the diaspora are acting as critical change agents in their parents' attitudes towards the host country. The second factor is the new meaning that engagement with education has recently taken on. In relation to the

changed meaning of engagement with education, I have pointed out that, due to the risks young people face in contemporary times, Somali parents have sought solutions involving engagement with education, which echoes the findings of previous research. For example, Portes and Rumbaut (2001: 107) argue that to manage the acculturation process of their children into the host culture, first generation immigrants strive to keep their children on the 'normative achievement path'. It is in this context that education (in addition to its intrinsic and instrumental values) serves as an instrument for Somali families to keep their children from straying.

In addition to community and family processes, the ways in which the Somali young people go about their choices is mediated through a myriad of individual level factors. The theme of agency in the formation of choice biographies runs through the accounts presented in Chapters 6 and 7, where the choices the young people make in relation to their identity and educational aspirations have been discussed. I outlined in the literature review how the very nature of these themes (personal and career identities) are an expression of individual biography and the data analysis has shown that the young people take pride in presenting their choices solely in terms of individual effort. That is, they tend to make decisions of their own accord, often resisting adult advice, where it threatens to undermine their autonomous decision-making and in situations where they do accept others' advice, they reframe it so as to show they are in charge of their choices. The difficulty, however, is that external influences that institutions like families and schools impose on children's formation of their worldviews, become blurred by the fact that they tend to internalise these influences as a spontaneous *habitus*. In particular, the notions of 'confidence in individual agency' and 'optimism', which feature in the young people's accounts early in their lives, make way for a more critical realisation of the constraints emanating from objective structures.

Most young people in this research believe in the necessity of upholding and enacting the self-betterment narratives of their parents' generation in the sense that they believe in 'working hard' towards desired educational outcomes. This attitude towards education resonates with Fukuyama's observation that immigrants possess a 'greater than average degree of energy, toughness, ambition and adaptability' (1993: 28). The stories of the majority of the young people who participated in this research show they possess these attributes, with most Somali immigrant families using education to compensate for their disadvantaged position in the host society and hence, to enhance the life-chances of their

children. However, not all young people unreflectively subscribe to the idea of education as a family project, nor are their views towards education solely determined by their migration biographies, for as critical agents, some want to write their own choice biographies. In much the same way as optimism is implicated in migration biographies, so is the individual choice biography in the very nature of choices and aspiration, because owing to its very essence, the formation of educational aspiration cuts across 'race', gender and class boundaries, while being essentially personal. In line with this, my research has shown the emphasis on shared commonalities vis-à-vis understanding the processes of Somali young people's identity construction in relation to engagement with prevailing opportunity structures has some disadvantages. It misses out the complexities and the role of critical agency on the part of young people. Instead, I have suggested that young people's choice biographies are characterised by an overwhelming emphasis on their uniqueness and urgency for self-realisation.

Key dimensions of this theme of agency are 'determination', 'motivation' and 'optimism', which repeatedly appear in the accounts of the young respondents. These dimensions show that while society requires conformity, young people value autonomy and individuality, preferring to learn heuristically from their own experiences. That is, they prefer to exercise choice in the way they see it fits with their individual identity and, in doing so, they maintain a sense of being in control over their destinies, rather than living up to the normative expectations of others. However, they tend to overestimate what they realistically can achieve with their abilities, strongly believing in their individual agency to achieve their life goals. That is, they reassure themselves that life chances merely reflect individual efforts and capabilities (Evans, 2002). Moreover, they tend to extend their positive engagement with the education system to other domains of life and entertain high expectations that their educational outcomes will similarly be positive, readily explaining failure away as being down to an individual's faults or as fate and not as a result of inequality of opportunities.

The positive attitude shown by the young people in their early post-16 stage can be understood to emanate from their life experiences. Here it is suggested that their first-hand experiences with opportunity structures are largely limited to their assessments in school settings, which pertain to the idea that educational achievement largely reflects individual performance and thus, it is perfectly rational for them to assume that the realisation of ambition in other domains of life similarly follows effort. Consequently,

optimism and confidence are in some cases indicative of a lack of awareness of the external factors and often frustrating opportunity structures in the competitive labour market, which constrain people's life-chances. Previous studies indicate similar observations of 'school leaver hopefuls' (Ball et al., 2000: 4). In their study of post-compulsory transition, these commentators observe that 'the extended opportunities young people have to remain in education obscure the structural and material continuities which pattern their choice' (p. 4). The data analysis confirm these observations: it has emerged that early in their post-16 stage the young people take it for granted that as long as they engage well with education their transition into the world of work will not be problematic. Further, it has emerged that their confidence in 'agency' and 'hard work' as key definers of the formation of their aspirations remains high into their late adolescence and early twenties, but declines with maturation. That is, there is a general feeling of uncertainty among most of the older respondents, which often sets in during the critical passages when entry into the labour market becomes imminent.

9.5 Aspiration is not enough; you need to be pragmatic too

The emerging pro-education attitude discussed in Chapter 6 cannot be explained solely in terms of immigrant or adolescent optimism. In that chapter, I considered the view that the limited opportunities outside the education system for young people render engaging with it as being their only possible option. That is, with the available economic and employment opportunities outside the education sector being limited both in scope and in nature, their immediate choice is often to continue with education rather than drop out, not only because of an intrinsic valuing of education, but perhaps also because of there being no other viable option to choose. That is, unlike the oppositional culture among 'disadvantaged' ethnic minority youth highlighted in much of the educational research, this study has shown a broadly positive attitude towards education. As discussed in the literature review, concerns have been raised about the educational achievements and outcomes of some groups within the minority ethnic communities (Gillborn, 1997). In the case of the Somali young people these concerns raised in relation to educational outcomes, therefore, cannot be attributed to lack of aspiration, but to structural influences. Shildrick and MacDonald (2007: 7) found that despite a great deal of focus on 'social change' in youth transitions, there is still 'continuity' in the experiences of young people from working class backgrounds.

The findings suggest that, faced with inequalities in opportunity structures, young people respond in one of two ways: some 'own up to' disappointing educational outcomes as 'fate' or as 'individual failure' and suspend further commitments to education; in the words of Dews (1987: 276), this can be seen as 'compensation for an actual powerlessness'. Some young people question the instrumental utility of education, and re-evaluate their strategies for getting into employment; thus, getting a job takes priority over developing a career. Others reposition themselves in relation to the prevailing opportunity structures and find a new niche in the labour market. In either way the frustration of childhood ambitions leads to redefinition of selfhood either in light of new experiences or in response to exclusion from mainstream society. Their similarly changing biographies intersect with external forces that shape their destiny, which reflects the view that social reproduction continues to prevail as discussed in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

For most of the young people interviewed aspiration is not in short supply and their life chances are intertwined with their 'racial' and cultural backgrounds. Given the fact that their outcomes are determined by external factors, one would have expected concerted effort on the part of the Somali community. However, the lack of political representation of the Somali community discussed earlier has ramifications for the ways in which the Somali young people I spoke to position themselves or are positioned in the wider multicultural society; it increases their risk of socioeconomic marginalisation. What this effectively means is that all these young people receive from their parent generation is the view of using educational opportunities available to them to the fullest and beyond this transferred work ethic, it is left to the young people to negotiate their way through the education to work transition processes. As I discuss below, aspiration is not sufficient, for young people also need to be more pragmatic in the ways in which they engage with opportunity structures. As highlighted in the literature review, navigating through the complex education system during adolescence as a way to make the transition into the adult world of higher education or work is a daunting task for most young people (Ball et al., 2000; Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001; Taylor, 2005).

The accounts of those I have drawn on have revealed that, for the majority, drawing up an educational or a career plan involves engaging with education less for its intrinsic value than for its instrumental (utility) one. This distinction is not usually clear to them until they experience inequalities in the employment market. It is often after obtaining

qualifications, or after first-hand experiences with the labour market that belief in the meritocratic values of education is questioned, as one young person put it, 'a degree is the minimum requirement and it really is not more than that'. Of course, as some of the narratives discussed in this research suggest, young people reflectively engage with their choices, because as I have argued, aspiration is essentially dynamic as well as being imbued with human subjectivity, and yet conditioned or constrained by situational contexts. As young people progress through their education their aspirations shift from being more idealistic to being more realistic; expectations and interests change with acquired new experiences, often of unequal opportunities. In addition, they develop different interests as they mature and interact more with people outside their immediate family. These findings are similar to those of Evans' (2007) study, which concluded that young people's transition behaviour is, in the end, is shaped by striking a balance between 'personal interests, and occupational choices within structural opportunities' (p. 86). Hodgkinson and Sparkes (1997) found that young people's career decisions are reflective of their changing biographies and in this respect are 'pragmatically rational'. That is, young people adjust their aspirations to what is practically available and they develop this strategy through their interaction with 'significant others' (Hodgkinson and Sparkes, 1997: 33).

A key theme emerging from this research is that these dimensions of adolescent optimism, immigrant optimism and opportunity structures associated with the formation of aspirations mediate the ways in which the Somali young people engage with education processes. In addition to the individual level factors discussed in the previous section of this chapter, there are socioeconomic dimensions and family cultural capital, which equally shape the strategies of the Somali community for navigating through the opportunity structures. In particular, the educational outcomes of the Somali young people are closely associated with the politics of recognition and citizenship. As discussed in Chapter 8, investment by Somali families in education and academic endeavours shown by the young people of this community are to a large extent mediated by migration biographies. However, the educational outcomes and intergenerational social mobility of this community is being determined by the '*othering*' practices and by the lack of recognition in mainstream society. It is in response to the racism and discrimination that some young people experience in the hegemonic social relations in the context of the host society that they use to this situation to justify their 'why bother attitude', as one community worker put it.

It is not only educational outcomes that are mediated by structural factors, for identity and belonging similarly are shaped by hegemonic discourses. Thus, although Somali young people increasingly position themselves in the wider British multicultural setting, claiming a cosmopolitan/global citizenship, they have also started to become aware that life-chances are not separable from their '*othered*' ethnic minority status. As one community worker pointed out, young people 'are aware they would never be accepted'. Consciousness of 'otherness' is dormant and enacted when necessary as a form of coping with the cultural and linguistic discontinuities the community faces in the host country. However, the feeling of becoming positioned as an 'other' in the context of UK 'race' relations fails to enact solidary responses or the emergence of 'ethnicity' as a resource to counteract stereotyping and '*othering*' practices. To a considerable extent, the themes of 'individual responsibility' and 'outcome as a function of individual effort' reflect the 'responsibilisation' of life choices current in the discourses of risk society (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Previous studies have shown similar findings regarding agency by young people (Devadson, 2007; Lehman, 2004; McDonald et al., 2011; Stokes and Wyn, 2007).

In my review of the literature in Chapter 2, I showed that historically studies attempting explain differential outcomes for different groups of young people have often drawn on class analysis and the way social inequality is reproduced, but relatively scant attention has been paid to the particular situation of those from ethnic minority backgrounds. The culturalist explanation of differences in the transition of young people from ethnic minority groups suggests that 'attitudes, value orientations and outlooks common in a particular community shape the aspirations of youth of ethnic minority backgrounds' (Vermeulen and Perlman, 2000). In contrast, those foregrounding structural factors hold the view that much of the individual's actions, to a great extent, result from structural forces beyond what individuals, particularly those from some socio-cultural groups, can affect. In Chapter 2, I argued that post-16 choice making is, to a certain degree, linked to wider choice-making in the educational field, where parents actively choose to engage, or fail to engage, in selecting appropriate schools for their children. The importance of families in post-16 choice-making, though probably not visible at the school-leaving stage, could have been laid during a child's primary socialisation and the evidence from my study confirms the importance of family influences on young people's choice-making processes. Furthermore, I suggested that our understanding of the aspirations of

second-generation immigrants will remain incomplete if contextual variables are not taken into account.

This thesis has shown that engagement with education is not necessarily only a consequence of lack of opportunities elsewhere. Indeed, young people early in their post-16 stage do not factor unemployment prospects into their career planning. What counts for them more are personal attributes, such as ‘working hard’, and ‘enjoyment’ and if education does not work for them they explain this in terms of either personal shortcomings or fate. That is, they do not see structural inequalities emanating from their social and racial backgrounds. It is within this context that I have suggested that age/life stage mediates young people’s choice biographies and hegemonic opportunity structures eventually determine their life-chances. However, despite the individualistic tendency in the orientation among the young people, the evidence suggests that for emerging visible ethnic minority communities, ‘race’ and class continue to define their social mobility in the mainstream host society more than language and culture. These findings, which imply that ‘race’ matters for incorporation and life-chances more than cultural and linguistic parameters, confirm previous research in which it has been contended that ‘race’-related practices prevalent in the hegemonic society continue to dominate the life-chances of individuals and communities, and they can thus be better understood at the level of the community rather than at the level of the individual (Archer, 2003; Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; Gillborn, 2006).

9.6 Young people first, then Somali young people

So far, most of the preceding discussion has focused on contextualising the dimensions of the experiences of Somali young people. The complexity of their experiences has a further dimension in that in its developmental sense, age transcends class and ‘race’; this is the case even when much of the young people’s transitions are socially constructed either through the education system or through social rites of passage. A key theme emerging from Chapters 6, 7 and 8 is the changing aspirations of the young people over time. Early in their post-16 stage, some tend to entertain high aspirations showing conviction in their individual capacities to achieve their goals, while others avoid making commitments and prefer to go through the post-16 education phase by making tentative changes. For the majority of the school-aged educational choices are informed by the immediacy of interest and passion rather than by the ‘utility’ of the choices or by what is realistically possible. These choices, therefore, do not necessarily fit in with

labour market conditions. I have suggested that expectations and aspirations and their associated choice-making strategies remain high during the idealistic stage, but with the passage of time they become less prominent or even lose relevance for the choice-making processes. That is, structural factors take on a different meaning for them as they grow older, when they leave the protective mantra of their parents and interact or engage independently and directly with the realities of the opportunities available.

The factors of age and agency are interrelated. For example, it has emerged that not all the young people subscribe to the normative expectations of having clearly formulated career plans as some keep their options open. One way of interpreting this contingency attitude is to consider the agential dimension of aspiration, where it has emerged that they simply want to exercise autonomy in their choice-making. Clearly, their orientation towards education on leaving school and early in their post-16 education is mediated by individual dispositions. Another way of explaining this contingency planning is to consider the developmental dimension of aspiration. It is suggested that by virtue of their age, young people are more concerned at this stage with the immediacies of enjoying life, e.g. 'cussing' and 'having a laugh' (Willis, 1977), rather than with serious and constructive engagement with the choice process. The future is too distant and too daunting for most of them, so they settle for representing it in a positive light. This positive attitude towards the future and the positive self-image associated with it can be seen as strategies for managing risks and uncertainties so as to get on with 'the business of living' (Elster, 1989). Previous research shows that most adolescents, whether they are driven by idealistic choices or procrastinate about their choice commitments, feel overconfident about their capabilities to achieve their aspirations. This sense of being in control is partly a manifestation of their age/experience-related perspective. In this respect, the findings of my research resonate with those of Willis (1977) who found that children from a working class background worked themselves into working class jobs through their anti-school culture stance, but the irony of this process is that these young people feel that they are in control of their destinies. In sum, what young people's changes in perception show is that although young people have the pretension of exercising choices, the development of their priorities is mediated by interaction with objective structures.

The evidence shows that as they mature, young people's choices take on a more concrete shape. I have suggested that these changing patterns are manifestations of the life course,

because perceptions are often closely related to their life course development. For them, a decline in aspirations with age is partly related to the realisation of the limits of their individual efforts in the face of hegemonic opportunity structures. These patterns resonate with what was discussed in the literature review, where it was argued that as they mature as adolescents they may assume more control over their lives not necessarily only because of biological changes, but also because transition is socially and institutionally regulated (Lesko, 1996), and because they acquire the ‘discursive capital required for adjusting to the changing context in which they make choices’ (Tlili, 2007: 285). I have argued that their positive attitude towards schooling and optimism about the future become moderated by reflective engagement with their agency, individual attributes and by new experiences with the labour market, all of which coincide with maturation. For the majority of the young people, concrete career planning informed by the opportunities available often takes shape after the young person has gained qualifications, i.e. when they seriously think of ‘what to do next’. Not only does opportunity-driven choice replace interest-driven aspiration, but also and more importantly, the influences of contextual factors take on a different meaning for them. The challenge Somali young people face then is not always gaining qualifications, but rather the value of these credentials in breaking into the labour market, achieving social mobility and escaping social exclusion. That said, it also needs to be pointed out that for some, gaining qualifications has itself been problematic, as shown by the accounts of those whose learner identities have been damaged (cf. Section 8.3 of Chapter 8).

Based on the findings, it has been argued that the dimensions of confidence, a feeling of being in control, optimism and high expectation reflect not only individual biographies, but also a young person’s age/life stage. These attributes are strong during school-leaving age and early in the post-16 stage, but decrease with maturation. That is, early in young people’s lives interactions with significant others shape their choice biographies more than their interaction with opportunity structures. At this stage they overestimate what they can achieve and underestimate potential structural barriers and for most of them, ‘as long as you work hard, you will be fine’. On the basis of the evidence presented in this thesis, it would appear that the factor of ‘age’ is differently associated with aspirations. Following this, it is suggested that one cannot endlessly aspire, since aspirations in the domain of educational and career choices involve a dimension of age. That is, one can argue that the urgency of making life choices tends to increase with maturation, while aspirations tend to decline (Jacobs et al., 1991). Similarly, one cannot

endlessly postpone the decision to choose because even failing to do so in itself represents a choice. In summary, it can be argued that with maturation the factor of age loses its significance in defining the ways in which young people engage with the education process. This decline in the relevance of age for the development of aspirations can be understood in terms of the social and institutional significance of transition. In relation to this point, Furlong and Biggart (1999: 25) found that ‘the aspiration/expectation relationship was close during early secondary school’. For most young people aspiration declines with maturation and this decline is a response to the development of awareness of the contextual or structural factors. It is in this change of aspiration over time that the factor of age gives an insight into the nature of the development of aspirations. However, this is not to suggest that aspirations are high in childhood and early adolescence only because of the limitations of the stage of cognitive development these children are at, for these dimensions also form the basis for the socialisation influences to bear meaning.

9.7 Implications for policy, practice and theory

This section addresses the two questions of ‘what are the implications of this study for making sense of what is going on for the Somali community?’ in relation to policy and community work and the question of ‘what are its theoretical/analytical implications?’

Implications for policy and policy makers: Themes like ‘community engagement’ and ‘community cohesion’ have been a central focus for successive governments in Britain (Blake et al., 2008; Change Institute, 2009; Diamond, 2010; Rhamie, Bhopal and Bhatti, 2012). Ethnic minority communities, particularly those of Muslim background are ‘under public and government scrutiny’ and of additional interest to policy makers owing to the current global security concerns (Change Institute, 2009: 20). Consequently, there is a need to become cognisant of the dynamics within these communities so as to be able to address effectively pertinent issues that affect their daily lives, such as housing, education, unemployment, crime and since recently, security in the widest sense of the word. In April 2009, the Change Institute produced a report commissioned by the Cohesion Directorate of Department of Communities and Local Governments to identify how the UK ‘could best engage and work in partnership with specific communities’ (Change Institute, 2009: 5). The Somali community was one of thirteen Muslim ones targeted in this Understanding Muslim Communities project and this report has highlighted the need for policy makers to get to know about best practice.

I anticipate that my research will have some policy implications in that it sheds light on the focal community, which could prove valuable for effectively supporting it.

Some of the key themes emerging from my research deemed relevant for policy makers include the insight that the internal division among the Somali community has generated complexities for multicultural policies. I suggest that a sophisticated understanding of the UK Somali community is required, because trying to understand this community merely in the context of pre-migration narratives and historical social practice involves the risk of essentialising and freezing these features in time and space. Clearly, one can argue that polarisation in the Somali community overshadows the collective discrimination and prejudice they face in the hegemonic structural conditions. However, it is not only the historical and pre-migration social practices that define dynamics among members of this community, because the context of the host society equally shapes community dynamics. Moreover, I have emphasised the role young people coming of age in the diaspora play in the change dynamic their parent generation is going through.

Second, the work presented in this thesis has implications for policy, because at the heart of the community engagement campaign is the task of linking up and working with local community organisations representing disadvantaged groups (Blake et al., 2008). That is, most community organisations are publicly funded, and most provide ‘more of the same’ rather than innovative services that transcend the community divide, intergenerational dissonance and gender issues. Given the current economic climate, where funding for charity is dwindling, a more targeted funding policy is ever more pressing. The challenge for funding bodies in proposals for community initiatives is to assess the extent to which the services provision being put forward is innovative and the degree to which there is wide support for it from the different sections of the community. I suggest that without careful consideration, multicultural policies that encourage community initiatives within the Somali community may unwittingly contribute to community cleavage rather than cohesion. In this respect, I hope that my research has generated some insights into the problematic relations among members of the Somali community and the implications of these for its intergenerational social mobility.

Implications for community work and community workers: There is a genuine concern about the continuation of kinship *habitus* (to use Bourdieu’s term) still mediating community relations. There is also the dilemma for community workers that the sanctity

of cultural heritage is, for first generation Somalis, something that cannot be compromised. The idea of community is their imagined retreat, and means stability for their selfhood. Indeed, informal support is arranged through extensive kinship networks and also the idea of community imagination has a positive impact for what has been called ethnic minority 'place-making' (Gill, 2010). Valentine et al. (2007: 245) found that the mere awareness of being part of a larger community feeds into the 'perception of safety and trust'. However, the problem is that such feeling safe amidst one's own community is not sufficient for mobilising organised forms of collective representation. One implication I hope that the findings and arguments from my research will have for community workers is that they will challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions that all cultural practices are inherently good, for clearly some require critical reflection on the part of community leaders. One particular custom that is re-enacted in the diaspora, often among the first generation, is the role of kinship-based social relations in the formation of cohesive Somali community organisations. I suggest that the problem with the kinship-embedded social organisation can perhaps be understood in terms of what Granovetter (1985) calls 'the problem of embeddedness', in a kind of social relationship practice, which though in principle is meant to advance the interest of the individual through reciprocal relations, overlooks the exclusion dimension that creates cleavages in the same community that is meant to coalesce together. For community workers, not all the apprehensions about discontinuity in the native heritage should indeed be seen as a loss. On the contrary, it is contended that discontinuities in the intergenerational transmission of the kinship script could perhaps mark the beginning of a more cohesive community in the younger generations who will assert demands for collective identity on the basis of what they collectively share. That said, one cannot ignore the political dimensions of the kinship structure and the role of transnational links in maintaining these in the diaspora. For, kinship relations and politics have become closely interrelated in Somali cultural and political practice.

Serving the Somali community, for both community workers and policy makers, requires critical engagement with fundamental issues that touch one's ontological security. To be a Somali is to have a known mythical ancestral lineage, and hence kinship identity carries profound meaning, in the sense that it carries what Portes (2010: 1540) calls 'normative blueprints' for social relationships. Moreover, to be a Somali is to be Muslim and I contend that these two 'signifiers' constitute the core of what makes the Somali identity (Hall, 1996). Ajrouch and Kusow (2007) make a similar point, arguing

that Islam has become a key marker of what it is to be a Somali in the West. Notwithstanding diversity in Islam and the role of individual agency of kinship identity, the organising frameworks of these phenomena pull the Somali community in different directions. As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, there are dynamics of change that challenge the continuity of these aspects in the diaspora. Indeed, discontinuity of some forms of kinship-based social relationships might be a solution to the intractable dilemma in Somali community relations. However, the difficulty is that such a break with the past is exactly the discontinuity the parent generation wants to resist and even more interestingly, provides the *raison d'être* for the formation of community organisations.

Those working with the Somali community should engage critically with community processes to find ways of rising above the divide generated and maintained by kinship practices. However, I suggest that this is not an easy task, for it involves negotiating the risk inherent in the enactment of native cultural practices, which includes the reification of differences among different kinship groups. Such kinship social practice is also often difficult to overcome because kinship as a system is the basic fabric of the people of Somali heritage; it is determined through a complex web of genealogical relations that are *essentialising* and these shape the social location of individuals within the kinship landscape. These *essentialising* differences between different kinship groups underpin much of how Somalis interact with one another through a kinship prism that polarises community relations into in-groups and out-groups and in certain situations even into friends and foes. Of course, kinship-based social practices are more ambiguous than can be represented in the simple binary of in-group and out-group. It is this ambiguity that makes it difficult for Somalis to negotiate contradictions implicated in the kinship system and also difficult for policy makers to understand Somalis. Thus, the challenge for community leaders is to be aware that the search for meaning in life can potentially put Somali young people at risk of crime or transnational radicalisation and to help their incorporation into the native culture.

Implications for schools: Education has several aims to serve. In its instrumental sense it can be considered as 'preparation for life' (Winch, 2000: 25) and as a way of achieving intergenerational social mobility. But instrumental engagement with education for the benefit of advancing one's career prospects requires sophisticated knowledge and understanding of not only the schooling system, but also the intricacies of the labour market. As has been demonstrated in this thesis, education is held in high regard among

the Somali community. However, the crucial question of ‘education for what?’ appears to be absent from young people’s post-16 strategies and also neglected in the popular discourses among this community. Instead, engagement with education on its own is seen as an end in itself and this has practical relevance: alternatives to education are limited and dropping out increases the risk of delinquency. In policy circles and schools, young people from black and minority ethnic groups are often portrayed in terms of deficiency discourses, which focus on either their cultural or racial backgrounds. Consequently, much of the rhetoric of ‘raising aspiration of black boys’ interventions (DfES, 2003) does not adequately address fundamental issues of social justice and distribution. In their longitudinal study of science aspirations amongst minority ethnic students, DeWitt et al. (2011: 261) point out that their findings do not reconcile with how these communities are positioned in government policy discourses, i.e. that poor educational outcomes and problems with post-16 progression is due to ‘a culture of low aspiration’. This mismatch between aspiration/expectation on the one side and outcome on the other is well captured by Gillborn et al.’s title ‘You got a pass, so what more do you want?’ (Gillborn et al., 2012). Indeed, in their study of black middle-class families, Gillborn et al. (2012: 121) found that it is the intersectional relationship between class, ‘race’ and gender that defines the everyday experiences of these families and their children.

However, the young people in my research showed no signs of lack of aspiration and indeed, in many cases there was over-aspiration. During the fieldwork, I noted that quite often the Somali young people have been navigating their way through the numerous post-16 education trajectories without much help from their parents and without career advice from the wider Somali community. That is, for most of them such support does not exist, which is often because their parents lack the required cultural capital for engaging with the education process. There is among the community organisations a consensus that Somali young people lack required guidance around instrumental engagement with education; instrumental in the sense of career outcomes. It is here that schools and community organisations can make a difference to the ways in which they engage with the complexities of post-16 education pathways. The concerns are then more about poor educational outcomes than about lack of aspirations and reflect the trenchant inequalities of opportunities in the labour market rather than oppositional behaviour or non-engagement with the education process. Positive engagement with education is not paralleled by instrumental engagement with it, that is, using it as a

stepping stone for enhancing life-chances. For, to do so requires not merely familiarity with the schooling system but also understanding the world of work. Lack of knowledge of the intricacies of the instrumental utility of education and how it is related to the employment market often leads young people to become disillusioned when the anticipated outcome of their efforts fall short of their expectations. Community organisations could be a source of information and of inspiration.

Consequently, it is the denial of the full rights of citizenship they confront in their new homeland that can drive alienated Somali young people to fall into the trap of social exclusion or to seek belonging elsewhere, in particular, in an imagined global *ummah*. I suggest that the risk of radicalisation among these people across the West makes a critical understanding of what is going on for and among them even more imperative. The stories of the few young people benefiting from additional support or career advice from someone they associate themselves with speak volumes of the need for instrumental career guidance to supplement the low degree of cultural capital at the family level. What would help avert the risk of alienation is perhaps to address the contradictions of multiculturalism where cultural pluralism is embraced, but critical issues of belonging in the multicultural ‘melting pot’, in terms of improved life-chances, are out of reach for most of these young people. Addressing issues of the persistent gap in educational performance and outcomes that run along ethnic and racial lines could perhaps be achieved if the meritocratic values education offers, or better, should offer, are translatable into social mobility for all. Also, if children and young people see ‘people of their kind’ working in the schools they attend or in public offices they visit, much of the feeling of hopelessness and alienation could perhaps be ameliorated. Clearly, addressing social injustice inherent in the hegemonic social organisation cannot be easily dealt with through a tokenistic recruitment of staff from black and minority ethnic communities. Gillborn (2008: 16) argues that racial inequality in education is an intrinsic part of the ‘current system’. However, positive implications of the local workforce (teachers, police officers, social workers, health professionals) reflecting the composition of the local communities for young people’s subjectivities cannot be underestimated either.

Of course, addressing concerns surrounding the Somali young people also requires practical support, but this should be provided while taking into account the values of the people and their families. Clearly, making additional support available requires political sensitivity as it could be seen as patronising and stigmatising. This has been the case in

Canada, where in January 2014, a group of Somali parents demonstrated against what they perceived as ‘stigmatisation’ of their children at school after the Toronto District School Board set up a ‘Somali Task Force’ for additional education provision (Brown, 2014). The demonstrating parents demanded that their children should be treated within the mainstream provision. Hence, there is a fine balance between portraying Somali young people as being in need of requiring additional support and ensuring that it is appropriate. Ultimately, these are young people and like most in contemporary societies they struggle with life transition during this critical period of ‘emerging adulthood’ (Arnett, 2000).

Implications for theory and analytical frameworks: Finally, my research has a few theoretical or analytical implications. First, it is argued that this study has contributed to the complexities of the conceptual frameworks that draw on collectivities, such as the analytical frameworks of the social capital or culturalist perspectives. These frameworks have been used to explain variations in patterns of social mobility amongst immigrant young people by focusing on the facilitative role of social networks and interpersonal relationships. The strength of these analytical frameworks is that they harmonise contextual processes and opportunity structures in the receiving society on the one side and factors operating at the micro level, i.e. norms, value orientations, language and interpersonal relationships embodied in the cultural practices of immigrant communities, on the other. However, their uncritical deployment for explaining why certain attributes of ethnic minority groups work for some immigrant communities and not for others underplays the dynamics of power relations within these communities and histories of alienation (Tlili and Obsiye, 2013). Moreover, the role of critical agency and subjectivities has been similarly neglected. Instead, I have suggested that the way in which young people from ethnic minority communities engage with opportunities in their transition to adulthood should be conceptualised as a process, which unfolds in a discursive social environment that is informed by both contextual and cultural factors. My approach has involved taking the cultural attributes of different socio-cultural groups into account and relating these to the prevailing socioeconomic and opportunity structures. My analysis has also shown that the interplay between these factors has different outcomes for different socio-cultural groups. Of course, there is now a growing literature that foregrounds the role of subjectivities, or the ‘*raced*’ and ‘*classed*’ power dynamics, in the ways in which young people engage with opportunity structures

(Bhopal and Maylor, 2014; Werbner 2013b) and in this respect I hope my findings have contributed to this growing body of literature.

A second theoretical/analytical implication of this research relates to the factor of age. It has highlighted the neglected role of the factor of age/life stage in the construction of choice biographies. In particular, it has emerged that age is one of the key parameters underlying the changing pattern of aspirations. The factor of age cuts across racial, class and social groups, but in the sociological research literature, its significance has not received as much attention as it requires. In fact, much of this literature pays only scant attention to the age-related dimension of aspirations and this neglect is perhaps related to the predominance of the sociological concepts of 'race', ethnicity, class and gender that have in a sense overshadowed age as a significant variable within sociological explanatory frameworks. I discussed this gap in the literature in Section 2.2 of Chapter 2 and revisited it again in the previous section of this chapter, where I argued that regardless of their 'racial' or social origin young people tend to entertain age-related high ambitions and have strong belief in attaining their aspirations.

While it is acknowledged that the developments of gender-specific roles are mediated through social practices, the factor of age remains salient to the development of the key characteristics of children's aspirations, such as optimism, self-efficacy, confidence and differences in aspirations/expectations. The key dimensions of aspiration, such as optimism, self-efficacy, confidence and the aspiration/expectations difference, are in some way related to age/life-stage. It might also be the case that the role of age in the age-related insights can be explained in the fact that these dimensions of young people's transition are often confused or perhaps even conflated with agency. Given this recognition of the role of age, one can argue that the formation of aspiration is not developmental *per se*, but is, by and large, embodied in the choice-dependency paradox in that one's early life choices shape one's subsequent trajectories.

Finally, the findings presented in this thesis may also have some implications for the conceptualisation of the idea of 'community' within the context of studying people from refugee backgrounds. In this thesis, I have made a distinction between 'community' as a group of people with not only shared, but also enacted commonalities (history, origin, culture, etc.) and as a collection of disjointed individuals with historically identifiable commonalities that are not enacted. In this sense, the idea of community has no meaning beyond its 'mental construct' (Cohen, 1989: 19) and, thus only remains an imagined reality. In much of the literature as well as in popular discourses, the idea of community

is often used 'favourably' (Williams, 1976: 67) as offering a safety net and hence, has positive connotations and a normative appeal. My thesis highlights the need to go beyond the deployment of the idea of 'community' in its normative sense. Arguably, the polarisation of the relations among Somalis in the UK poses critical questions about the extent to which this fragmentation alters the normative assumptions underlying the idea of community and about its *essentialising* connotations. Going beyond the normalising character of 'community' is also required, because the assumptions about homogeneity underlying its usage conceal the heterogeneity of the groups it describes. That is, like identity, groups of people can be lumped together by the majority groups and still regarded as a community. The Somali community is in a paradoxical situation: simultaneously fractured because of the internecine conflict in their country of origin and drawn together due to the alienating experiences in their everyday life in the host society. This ambivalent relationship gives the concept of 'community' a different character and meaning to what its totalising meaning would give.

9.8 Future research

I conclude this study by considering those areas that require further research. My analysis has led me to identify three key areas that future research on issues relating to Somali young people, their families and communities should consider. First, investigation will be required into the extent to which immigrant optimism, which underlies the positive attitude towards education and as well as presumably the logic of migration as whole, survives in the subsequent generations of young people of Somali descent in the UK. Kao and Tienda (1995) predict that immigrant optimism declines over time, because the longer they remain in the adopted country, the more their offspring become exposed to the negative peer pressure of the deprived neighbourhoods they often come to live in, which subsequently leads them to accept their 'allotted' position in the classed and racialised mainstream society. That is, unfavourable educational outcomes are likely to give rise to grounds for pessimism that make young people lose interest in utilising the opportunities available to them. Moreover, the view of 'immigrant optimism' is represented in culturalist terms, i.e. that culture provides first generation immigrants with a frame of reference within which they can make sense of the opportunities in the host country in the context of the conditions in their originating country.

Second, in many ways the young people whose accounts this study is based on are trendsetters in that the majority of them are the first cohort to have gone through the UK education system. They bear the burden of having to achieve their parents' immigrant dreams, and in this regard their educational outcomes mark the intergenerational social mobility of the emerging Somali community, but a full picture of their outcomes is yet to be seen. At this stage it has been noted that because of the life stage they are at, there are some early positive signs of drive and agency, but also reasonable causes for concern. While the majority of these young people are trying their best to utilise educational opportunities, for many their educational/career outcomes are problematic as they face the risk of becoming disaffected and socially marginalised. Moreover, this research has been thematically limited to questions pertaining to the ways in which Somali young people engage with education and construct their identities and belonging as well as the role of family and community dynamics in these processes. However, factors such as anti-social behaviour, crime, popular culture, leisure and gender were not explored. In the case of 'crime', it has been noted that there is concern among the first generation Somalis about high incarceration rates of their young people, usually young males. That is, there is the perception that they face greater risk of downward assimilation than their female counterparts and consequently most community organisations cater more for young males than young females. Consequently, the issue of gender appears to be absent from most community leisure activities. However, the topics of crime, leisure and gender were not the focus of my study. So future research could shed light on the extent to which high incarceration rates exist among the Somali community and the extent to which risk of social exclusion affects only young males.

Moreover, growing up within contemporary youth subcultures in the UK, where positive engagement with the schooling system is not necessarily the norm, Somali young people face an increased risk of alienation. There are discrepancies between what their parents expect of them and the challenges of social exclusion they face in their daily lives. These contextual problems are exacerbated by the precarious situation of their parents' generation, whose stay in the UK is defined by a shift from an unsettled presence, in the sense that they wish to return to their country of origin, to a settled absence, whereby they are becoming settled, but not fully incorporated socioeconomically in the host society. With longer duration in the host country, it is likely that the next generations of this community will find ways of dealing with the 'contradictions inscribed in their migration biographies' (Sayad, 2004: 58), that is, the ambivalent attitude towards the

host country and country of descent. For, one of the key aspects of the family dynamics of the current cohort is the lack of a three-generation family make-up and it could be the case that subsequent generations will enjoy the benefit of the presence of their families over three generations. The theme of parental involvement in the young people's engagement with education has repeatedly emerged from their accounts, but no parents were spoken to directly about their experiences. Given the centrality of the parental role in the processes discussed, future work should focus on their perspectives so as to complement the findings presented in this thesis. In particular, it would have been interesting to explore to what extent family strategies are mediated by the intergenerational differences. That is, future research should consider studying parental views in relation to their children's evolving choice biographies.

Finally, the study is geographically limited to London and community relations might be different for the Somali communities in other regions in the UK and it would therefore prove fruitful to compare the Somali community dynamics in general or Somali youth in particular in London with those elsewhere in the UK. This does not, however, mean that the relevance of the findings is limited to London. On the contrary, I anticipate that they will have some wider relevance for understanding problems and prospects that Somali youth are faced with not only in other regions of the UK, but also in other adopted countries in the West. As Lofland and Lofland (1984: 124) suggest, social scientists should not only concern themselves with the uniqueness of individual cases, but rather with the underlying uniformity. I also envisage that the insights about the community dynamics highlighted in this thesis will yield useful understanding regarding the social mobility of the Somali community in general.

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Appendix A: Ethical Approval

Mohamed Obsiye

The Department of Education & Professional Studies



11th February 2010

Dear Mohamed,

REP(EM)/09/10-30 'The Role of Social Capital in the Educational and Career Choice Making of the Somali Youth'

I am pleased to inform you that the above application has been reviewed by the E&M Research Ethics Panel that FULL APPROVAL is now granted.

Please ensure that you follow all relevant guidance as laid out in the King's College London *Guidelines on Good Practice in Academic Research* (http://www.kcl.ac.uk/college/policyzone/attachments/good_practice_May_08_FINAL.pdf).

For your information ethical approval is granted until 31st July 2012. If you need approval beyond this point you will need to apply for an extension to approval at least two weeks prior to this explaining why the extension is needed, (please note however that a full re-application will not be necessary unless the protocol has changed). You should also note that if your approval is for one year, you will not be sent a reminder when it is due to lapse.

If you do not start the project within three months of this letter please contact the Research Ethics Office. Should you need to modify the project or request an extension to approval you will need approval for this and should follow the guidance relating to modifying approved applications: <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/research/ethics/applicants/modifications.html>

Any unforeseen ethical problems arising during the course of the project should be reported to the approving committee/panel. In the event of an untoward event or an adverse reaction a full report must be made to the Chairman of the approving committee/review panel within one week of the incident.

Please would you also note that we may, for the purposes of audit, contact you from time to time to ascertain the status of your research.

If you have any query about any aspect of this ethical approval, please contact your panel/committee administrator in the first instance (<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/research/ethics/contacts.html>). We wish you every success with this work.

Yours sincerely
Daniel Butcher

Research Ethics Administrator

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH STUDIES



University of London

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.

Title of Study: The Role of Social Capital in the Educational and Career Choice Making of the Somali Youth in London

King's College Research Ethics Committee Ref: REP (EM)/09/10-30

- Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The person organising the research must explain the project to you before you agree to take part.
- If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.
- *I understand that if I decide at any time during the research that I no longer wish to participate in this project, I can notify the researchers involved and withdraw from it immediately without giving any reason. Furthermore, I understand that I will be able to withdraw my data up to 30th March 2011.*
- *I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes explained to me. I understand that such information will be treated in accordance with the terms of the Data Protection Act 1998.*

Participant's Statement:

I _____

agree that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I agree to take part in the study. I have read both the notes written above and the Information Sheet about the project, and understand what the research study involves.

Title of study: The Role of Social Capital in the Educational and Career Choice Making of the Somali Youth

By way of introduction my name is Mohamed Obsiye. I am doing a Doctorate in Education at King's College London. I am writing to you to invite you to participate in this research, which focuses on the educational and career choice-making of the Somali second generation. You should only participate if you are willing to do so; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why I am doing this the research, on what basis I have identified you as a potential participant and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish.

For carrying out this research I have sought and obtained ethical approval from King's College London. My aim in this study is to explain and understand how Somali young people go about choosing between the different educational and career opportunities after they finish their compulsory education. I am planning to interview 10 young people who, like you, are going to take their GCSEs this year 2008/09. I have selected you because your local Somali community organisation or your friend, whom I have already interviewed, advised me that you might be able to participate. However, it is still up to you whether or not you are willing to participate. They will not know about your participation. The interview will take about 30 minutes and will be held at a location convenient to you and to your parents.

If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. You will have the right to withdraw your data at anytime even after we complete the interview and up until 30th June 2009 when I start to write-up my research. Please note that the data collected will be treated as confidential, stored securely and will be accessible only to myself as the researcher on this project and in the analysis and writing there will be no information that can identify you as a participant. All my records and data related to this research will be held securely at King's College London, according to the Data Protection Act 1998 and in accord with the College's guidelines on research ethics. All recordings and data will be used only for the purpose of this research, and will be destroyed upon completion.

If you wish, I will give you a copy of my analysis and findings once the research is completed. You can email me your request at Mohamed.obsiye@kcl.ac.uk. If this research has harmed you in any way you can contact King's College London using the details below for further advice and information (Dr. Anwar Tlili, anwar.tlili@kcl.ac.uk). I hope you will be able to contribute to this research, and I thank you very much for considering taking part in this research. If you have any questions or concerns, or if there is anything that is not clear and you would like more information please contact me using any of the contact details listed below. Alternatively you might contact my supervisor Dr. Anwar Tlili.

Best wishes,

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Appendix C2: Information Sheet for Participants - Young People

REC Protocol Number: REP (EM)/09/10-30

Title of study: The Role of Social Capital in the Educational and Career Choice Making of the Somali Youth in London

By way of introduction my name is Mohamed Obsiye. I am doing a PhD in Education Research at King's College London. I am writing to you to invite you to participate in this research. In this study I am focussing on the educational and career choice-making of the Somali youth. You should only participate if you are willing to do so. If you choose not to take part it will not disadvantage you in any way. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important that you understand why I am doing this research, how I have identified you as a potential participant and what I intend to do with the information you give me. Please read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish.

To be able to start conducting this research I have sought and obtained ethical approval from King's College London. My aim in this study is to explore how Somali youth go about choosing between the different educational and career opportunities. I am planning to interview 20 young people who, like you, are between the age of 16 and 21 years. I have selected you because your local Somali community organisation or a friend of yours, whom I have already interviewed, advised me that you might be able to participate. However, it is still up to you whether or not you are willing to participate. They will not know about your participation. The interview will take about 45 minutes and will be held at a location convenient to you, such as a coffee shop or on the premises of a community organisation. The interviews will mainly concern how you have come to the educational or choice you have made and your career ambitions for the future. We will also discuss your views regarding Somali community organisations.

If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. You will have the right to withdraw your data at anytime even after we complete the interview and up until 30th March 2011 when I start to write up my research. Please note that the data collected will be treated as confidential. In the analysis of the interviews and writing there will be no information that can identify you as a participant. All my records and data will be accessible only to myself and will be held securely at King's College London, according to the Data Protection Act 1998 and in accordance with the College's guidelines on research ethics. All recordings and data will be used only for the purpose of this research, and will be destroyed upon completion. If you wish, I will give you a copy of your interview once transcribed so that you can comment on it or make corrections. Also I will give you a copy of my analysis and findings once the research is completed. You can email me your request at Mohamed.obsiye@kcl.ac.uk.

If this research has harmed you in any way you can contact King's College London using the details below for further advice and information (Dr. Anwar Tlili, anwar.tlili@kcl.ac.uk). I hope you will be able to contribute to this research, and I thank you very much for considering taking part in this research. If you have any questions or concerns, or if there is anything that is not clear and you would like more information please contact me using any of the contact details listed below. Alternatively you might contact my supervisor Dr. Anwar Tlili.

Best wishes,

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Appendix C3: Information Sheet for Representatives of Community Organisations

University of London

REC Protocol Number: REP (EM)/09/10-30

Title of study: The Role of Social Capital in the Educational and Career Choice Making of the Somali Youth in London

By way of introduction my name is Mohamed Obsiye. I am doing a PhD in Education Research at King's College London. I am writing to you to invite you to participate in this research. In this study I am focussing on the educational and career choice making of the Somali youth. You should only participate if you are willing to do so. If you choose not to take part it will not disadvantage you in any way. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important that you understand why I am doing this research, how I have identified you as a potential participant and what I intend to do with the information you give me. Please read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish.

For carrying out this research I have sought and obtained ethical approval from King's College London. My aim with this study is to explore how Somali young people go about choosing between the different educational and career opportunities beyond their compulsory education. I am planning to interview 10 representatives of community organisations and 20 young people. I have selected your organisation because your organisation meets my sampling criteria, which includes locality, number of years the organisation is in operation and engagement with youth related projects. However, it is still up to you whether or not you are willing to participate. The interview will take about 45 minutes and will be held at a location convenient to you. The interviews will mainly concern your views regarding how the Somali youngsters go about making choices in the vast educational and career opportunities available. We will also discuss your views regarding the role of Somali community organisations in assisting the youth in planning their lives.

If you have any concerns please do let me know using any of the contact details shown at the bottom of this letter. Please be assured that that your organisation will not be disadvantaged in any way for not participating. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. You will have the right to withdraw your data at anytime even after we complete the interview and up until 30th March 2011 when I start to write up my research. Please note that the data collected will be treated as confidential, stored securely and will be accessible only to myself as the researcher on this project and in the analysis and writing there will be no information that can identify you as a participant. All my records and data related to this research will be held securely at King's College London, according to the Data Protection Act 1998 and in accord with the College's guidelines on research ethics. All recordings and data will be used only for the purpose of this research, and will be destroyed upon completion. If you wish, I will give you a copy of your interview once transcribed so that you can comment on it or make corrections. Also I will give you a copy of my analysis and findings once the research is completed. You can email me your request at Mohamed.obsiye@kcl.ac.uk.

If this research has harmed you in any way you can contact King's College London using the details below for further advice and information (Dr. Anwar Tlili, anwar.tlili@kcl.ac.uk). I hope you will be able to contribute to this research, and I thank you very much for considering taking part in this research. If you have any questions or concerns, or if there is anything that is not clear and you would like more information please contact me using any of the contact details listed below. Alternatively you might contact my supervisor Dr. Anwar Tlili.

Best wishes,

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Appendix D: Reflective Journal on Recruiting Young People Research Participants

Recruiting and collecting interview data from young people is not always straight forward. This has been the case today when I attended a Saturday football training session organised by one of the community organisations in my research, which they hold for the young people in their neighbourhood. This community leader, a gate keeper, invited me to this session, advising he would introduce me to a few young people to interview. I got myself ready for the visit by printing off a few copies of the information sheet for the potential research participants and arrived at the football ground well on time. About forty young people turned up for the training, and they were divided into two age groups (under twelve and over twelve) and then, because the training ground was too small, each group was subdivided into smaller teams of six players each. As the manager confided to me, some days up to seventy young people come to play football and often three adults, the community leader and two coaches, come to supervise the activity. One of the coaches was a college student, just a few years older than the older age group.

While waiting on the side line and watching them play and interact, I approached those waiting for their turns and became involved in talks with them between the match turns. Although it was not my original intention, my just being there and watching them play and interacting with them could perhaps be considered as observing. There were some insightful interactions I observed. For instance, I noted that based on their lexicon as second generation Somalis are often referred to as the '*say wallahi generation*'. They are given this reference because of English being their predominant language and the fact that their conversation is patterned by frequent interjection with the phrase of '*say wallahi*' (equivalent to 'are you serious, blood?') and its response of '*wallahi*' (equivalent to 'I swear down') in their conversations, but beyond these Anglicised lexicons, there were no traces of Somali language. Hearing all this, I just wondered why this generation is depicted as having English as a second language. Language is often regarded as important for the transmission of native cultural norms and values. I reflected that observation as a method of data collection could have been more appropriate than interviewing: observing what they do, how they do it, their interaction, and their engagement with the activity.

The second observation I made was that outdoor activities are primarily focused on males, but that this gap though recognised by the community leaders it is still justified on the basis that young males are an increased risk of alienation than their female peers. The topic of 'gender' was not necessarily a central focus of my research, but what I have noted today was 'a male-biased' service provision. Moreover, I noted that there were no parents present or even came to drop or pick up their children. The organisation has, indeed, made transport arrangements for the children. The high turnout for the football activity testifies the centrality of outdoor activities for young people. In addition to tuition, outdoor activities are very popular among the young.

After the match I approached a few young people I had identified earlier and had given them a copy of the information sheet, and because it was not practical to interview them at the venue, I wanted to arrange convenient times and places for doing so. I soon found out that they were obviously more excited about discussing the match than considering keeping my information letter let alone prepared to talk to me, and I soon found the letter I gave them flying around the ground. Collecting the letters, I thought to myself how difficult it is to interview young people in situations where there is distraction, because my interview would be distraction to their after-match debate, however in some situations young people need this distraction. This experience reminded me of an earlier

one when I similarly visited a youth centre. On that occasion, I managed to interview one young person from the say *wallahi* generation, but the quality of the recording and depth of the interview were both disappointing. You could hear the table tennis ping ponging in the background.

Having failed to get any young person to interview on this occasion, I approached the younger coach and asked whether he would be prepared to participate in my research, to which he willingly agreed. We went to a local McDonald's restaurant. Because it was noisy in the background, I asked my respondent to hold the recorder closer instead of putting it on the table. Unfortunately, just after around thirty minutes into the interview, we were told the restaurant was about to close. Back at home, I wanted to transfer my day's harvest of a thirty minute long interview to my computer for storage, but found that only four minutes was recorded and even the sound quality of the four minutes was poor, because it was polluted by the screeching of the tables in the background. I thought the battery must have died, but noted it was fine. The only other explanation I had for the lost recording was that because I gave the recorder to the interviewee, he must have fiddled with it. While interviewing was my main tool for collecting data, such experiences surrounding the context of my data collection influenced my overall development of idea and of course data analysis.

5th July 2011

Appendix E: Profile of Research Participants - Young People

No	Name*	Sex	Age	Place of birth	Typology**	Current situation	Brief biography
1	Abdirahman	Male	25	Somalia	Diaspora-raised	Youth worker	Abdirahman is the son of a seaman. He came to the UK at the age of seven and has since completed a BA degree course in Business Management. At the time of the interview, he was working as a youth worker, but also planning to start his own business.
2	Aboukar	Male	23	Somalia	Newcomer	Not in education, employment or training	Aboukar is a newly arrived young immigrant. He has been in the UK for eight months and spoke very limited English, but was keen to start English language courses. I met him at a community centre where I interviewed him together with Badr and Mahdi.
3	Adam	Male	24	Somalia	Diaspora-raised	Casual worker	Adam came to the UK as an unaccompanied minor seeking asylum when he was fifteen years old. He initially went to live with an aunt, but soon the relationship broke down and he was accommodated by the Social Services of a London Local Authority and placed with a foster carer. He has had numerous foster placement breakdowns and as a consequence of that not settled into any form of education, got involved in the world of drugs, but got himself back on track by resorting to his faith. At the time of the interview, he was working as a casual labourer, married with a daughter and the only respondent who was a parent. I met Adam in a local Somali café and interviewed him in a nearby park.
4	Ahmed	Male	15	Netherlands	Diaspora-born	GCSE student	Ahmed came to the UK with his family who moved from the Netherlands where he was born. When I met him he was revising for his GCSE exams at his friend's house (Hassan, see below).

5	Aisha	Female	20	Norway	Diaspora-born	Gap year student	Aisha was born in Norway, but has lived in the UAE for five years and then in Somalia for one year before coming to UK where she started in Year 11. She has completed a BTEC (college) course and had an offer for a university place in city in the UK, but at the time of the interview she had chosen to take a year out before commencing her university course and was doing voluntary work in a community centre where I met her.
6	Ali	Male	15	Somalia	Diaspora-raised	GCSE student	Ali was born in Somalia but grew up in Ethiopia and Saudi Arabia before his family came to the UK when he was ten years old. I interviewed him at a community centre where he attends weekend supplementary classes and Koran studies.
7	Amina	Female	24	Somaliland	Diaspora-raised	University student	Amina came to the UK from the Netherlands where she lived from age two and studied in an international school. She initially came to the UK with her father and her other family members joined them later. When I met her, she was finishing her master's degree in law at a London university and I interviewed Amina at a university campus.
8	Anisa	Female	23	Saudi Arabia	Diaspora-born	Graduate job seeker	Anisa was born in Saudi Arabia and has been in the UK since age two. She completed a degree course at a London university and at the time of our meeting she was working part-time in a retail shop, but was also looking for a graduate job commensurate with her education. I interviewed her together with her younger sister, Basra, at their parental home and in the presence of their father. I had to pair them up, because they were both observing Islamic conduct of dealing with an unrelated male.
9	Ayan	Female	14	Somalia	Diaspora-raised	GCSE student	Ayan was born in Somalia, but grew up in Ethiopia and Saudi Arabia before her family came to the UK when she was 9 years old. I interviewed her at a community centre, which she and her older brother Ali (see above) attend for supplementary and Koran classes.

10	Badr	Male	23	Somalia	Diaspora-raised	Not in education, employment or training	Badr was born in Somalia, but moved to Saudi Arabia where he had his primary schooling and came to the UK five years ago. While in the UK, he attended college, but at the time of the interview he was unemployed, having left education and was thinking of leaving the UK, although he was undecided for which country.
11	Basra	Female	21	UK	Second-generation	University student	Basra is UK-born and at the time of the interview was in the second year of a degree course in Tourism and Marketing at a London University. I interviewed Basra with her older sister Anisa (see above).
12	Choukri	Female	23	Somalia	Diaspora-raised	University student	Choukri is the daughter of a seaman and came to the UK aged 3, having not been back to Somalia since then. At the time of the interview, she was studying on a PCGE course and planning to go into the teaching profession. I interviewed Choukri with her young sister, Deqa, at their parental home because they were both observing Islamic conduct of dealing with an unrelated male.
13	Deqa	Female	21	UK	Second-generation	University student	Deqa is the daughter of a seaman who I interviewed with her older sister, Choukri (see above) at their parental home. When I met her, Deqa was in the first year of a degree course at a London university.
14	Farah	Male	21	Somalia	Newcomer	Not in education, employment or training	Farah was a member of the group of young people I described as newcomers. When I met him he had been in the UK for only 8 months and spoke very limited English, but was exploring English language courses. I interviewed him in Somali.
15	Geuddi	Male	16	Kenya	Diaspora-born	A-levels student	Geuddi was born in Kenya and came with his mother and siblings to the UK five years ago, reporting that his father had returned to Somaliland. I met him and his cousin, Youssuf, at a community centre where they attend supplementary classes. At the time I met him he had just completed his GCSEs and was waiting to start his A-levels.

16	Hamda	Female	21	Netherlands	Diaspora-born	University student	Hamda moved with her family from the Netherlands where she was born. I interviewed her at her mother's business venue. She was a second year business studies student and shared that she was the first in her family to go into higher education.
17	Haroun	Male	17	UK	Second-generation	A-levels student	Haroun was UK-born. At the time of the interview, he was studying for his A-levels and was also working part-time in a high street retail shop. Haroun told me he got himself involved with the 'wrong crowd', which led to him having leave his parental home and change neighbourhoods so as to live with extended family. He said this move has worked for him and that he was now back on track. I interviewed him in a local chicken and chips shop.
18	Hassan	Male	15	Netherlands	Diaspora-born	GCSE student	Hassan was born in the Netherlands. His family moved to the UK and first came to live in another big city in this country before settling in London. I interviewed him and his friend Ahmed in Hassan's parental home. At the time of visiting them they were revising for their GSSE exams and Hassan's father who is private tutor was helping them.
19	Hibo	Female	15	UK	Second-generation	GCSE student	I interviewed Hibo and her twin sister Rahma at their parental home. They came from a large family with younger siblings and an older brother who had gone through the GCSE experience and currently was helping her.
20	Jamal	Male	25	Somalia	Diaspora-raised	Not in education, employment or training	Jamal shared that he migrated to Germany with his family at the age of 8 and then moved to the UK to join his father's second family. He had completed his A-levels and started a degree course but left for personal reasons. I met him at a community centre and at the time I met him he was unemployed.

21	Kaysar	Male	15	UK	Second-generation	GCSE student	Kaysar was the youngest of a family of four brothers and three sisters who had all gone through the GCSE process. I met and interviewed him at a community centre where he came for weekend supplementary and Koran classes. Kaysar said he had ambition of studying electronic engineering or business, adding that his father was an electronics engineer.
22	Khadar	Male	19	Netherlands	Diaspora-raised	University student, gap year	Khadar was born in the Netherlands and relocated with his family to the UK when he was six years old. At the time of the interview, he was on a gap year during a degree course in civil engineering and was working for a courier company. He said he was considering quitting his degree course for an apprenticeship. I interviewed Khadar at his parental home. This was the second time I met him following an earlier interview at a McDonald's Restaurant when I experienced problems with the recording of the interview.
23	Mahdi	Male	22	Somalia	Newcomer	Not in education, employment or training	Mahdi had arrived in the UK just two months previously. He told me that he had not had formal education in Ethiopia where he grew up and spent most of his life before coming to the UK, but studied Koran which he teaches to his relatives' children. At the time of the interview, he was not in education, training or employment, but was exploring ESOL courses and told me he often came to the community centre, where I interviewed him together with Aboukar and Badr, for advice and guidance about courses available.
24	Nasir	Male	15	Netherlands	Diaspora-born	GCSE student	Nasir relocated with his family from the Netherlands. When I met him, he was revising for his GCSEs and told me he was the first of his family to go through the process, but added that his mother was helping him with a GCSE language option. I interviewed him at his parental home.

25	Omar	Male	14	UK	Second-generation	GCSE student	Omar is UK-born. I met him at a community centre where he was studying Koran classes and in addition told me he attended other private tuition as he was taking his GCSEs. He told me he was the first in his family to go through the GCSE processes, but that he had an uncle supporting him with his education.
26	Rahma	Female	15	UK	Second-generation	GCSE student	Rahma is Hibo's twin sister (see above).
27	Sahra	Female	24	UK	Second-generation	Social Worker	Sahra is daughter of a seaman and second youngest from a family of seven siblings, but the first to go to university. Sahra had completed BA and MA degrees and at the time of the interview and was working as a social worker. I interviewed Sahra at her workplace.
28	Suad	Female	14	UK	Second-generation	GCSE student	Suad UK-born, came from a large family. I met her in one of the community centres, which she attended during weekends for supplementary classes and Koran studies. One of her older sisters was a tutor at the community centre and she had an older brother who also helped her with maths.
29	Yassin	Male	17	UK	Second-generation	College student	Yassin is UK-born. I met him in a youth centre and at the time of the interview he was taking a BTEC course in engineering. Yassin told me he had an older brother.
30	Youssuf	Male	16	Somalia	Diaspora-raised	A-levels student	Youssuf was born in Somalia and came to the UK with his father and younger brother at a young age. He said he and his little brother were raised by their father adding that his mother had recently joined them in the UK. I met him and his cousin, Geuddi (see above), and interviewed him at a community centre where they attend for supplementary classes.

*Pseudonyms

** Typology:

1. Diaspora-born: Those born outside the UK and outside their parents' native country
2. Diaspora-raised: Those born in their parents' native country, but raised in the UK or elsewhere outside their parents' native country
3. Newcomer: Recently arrived in the UK
4. Second-generation: UK-born to immigrant parents

Appendix F: Interview Questions

Questions for Young people

1. Can you tell me about your experiences with your education?
2. What are you doing / have you done for your GCSEs and what do you hope or were hoping to achieve?
3. Can you tell me what areas of work or profession you want/you wanted to go into?
4. Can you describe how you have come to your choice and what is so attractive about it?
5. Did you talk to your parents, siblings, friends or teachers about what you wanted to do?
6. Where do you see yourself in the coming five years or so in terms of who you want to become?
7. How would you describe the Somali young people involved with education and employment compared to young people from other communities?
8. How do you describe or identify yourself?
9. How would you describe your contact with members of the Somali community or with community organisations?
10. What do you expect of them to be doing for young people like yourself?
11. Are there people from the Somali community who you look up to?

Questions for Community Leaders

1. Can you tell me how your involvement with Somali young people and or community has begun?

2. What things have struck you?
3. What are your thoughts regarding how Somali young people utilise educational and career opportunities?
4. What are your thoughts about challenges Somali young people face in education or with growing up in London?
5. What relations do you see exist between Somali young people and their older generation?
6. Where do you see Somali community in the UK in the coming ten, twenty years?
7. What role do you think organisations like yours could do to help educational performance of Somali young people?
8. What role you think young people could play in the social and economic position of the Somali community?
9. What are your thoughts regarding relations between the different Somali community organisations in London?
10. Some people say having strong links with your own ethnic community has negative impact on your personal progress, but others say those who are well connected with their own community have strong self-identity which helps them with their personal development. Where do you stand in this?

Appendix G: Excerpts of a Transcribed and Coded Interview

Interviewer: MO

Interviewee: C[houkri] (23 years old) ...

Venue: Parental home

Date: 07.12.2010

Duration interview: 00:49:13

[] corrected text

... text cut to shorten the transcript

Time	Interviewer/interviewee	Codes
00:00:00	MO: Thanks very much for agreeing to participate in this research... Your names will not be mentioned... I will call you C[hourki] ... you don't have to mention your name. I start with you C[houkri], talk to me about your experiences... starting from your childhood...	
	...	
	C[houkri]: I came to this country when I was three ... I can't really remember much about early years. I can remember my primary school experience. I wasn't really interested in many of the subjects. Apart from science, I enjoyed science... I don't know really.	UK-raised Mixed feeling about previous schooling experiences
	...	
	MO: Yeah	
	C[houkri]: I wasn't that engaged up until probably Year 5 when we started having like assessments and targets and stuff and I then I realised I had to get certain grades or certain levels... I remember Year 6, I remember, that was my first actual exam, we had SATs test. So that was intense. I remember studying for English, Science and Maths ... And I didn't really do that well in any. I did OK, I think... But, I think I was pretty average and none of the subjects really stuck out to me. So when I went to secondary school ... I began to enjoy English a lot more, which is what I later on	Average start to school life Becoming serious about getting required grades Effect of exams on learner identity No interest Self-appraisal learner identity Developing interest Self-appraisal learner identity Developing interest

	<p>anyway went to study. I started to enjoy English. We were doing personal writings and writing about diary. We would do so many different things. We were studying geography and like we would have visual aids like maps and illustrations. I was a lot more engaged. It depends on the different teachers that I had. They made learning more interesting at secondary school level, I found. When I got to Year 9 we had to basically pick 3 core subjects that we were gonna study at GCSE level, our choices. I picked drama, CDF and humanities. And to be honest humanities was because of a particular teacher. I really, really liked her. She was really understanding and she used to speak to us about different cultures and she used to tell us things like, you know, she used to make us really comfortable even though she was an English teacher, she was a white women from a middle class background, she made everyone feel equal in her class and everyone just always called her the ‘nice teacher’...</p>	<p>Explaining/justifying interest</p> <p>Effect of subject of interest</p> <p>Taking on a different learner identity</p> <p>Teacher impact on student learner identity</p> <p>Making GCSE choices</p> <p>Teacher influence</p> <p>Positive relations with teacher</p> <p>Teacher influences on choice-making</p> <p>Impact of the ‘nice teacher’ on student learner identity and self-worth</p>
	...	
00:06:35	MO: What did you want to be doing after your GCSE at the time?	
	<p>C[hokri]: At the time, oh yeah, at the time I wanted to be like a psychologist, or like a counsellor or something to do with or I was even like I was looking into social sciences. And I remember saying to Mrs [teacher name], my humanities teacher, I remember saying to her ‘what can I do for A-levels?’ Cos I was thinking cos they were basically encouraging us, people who were basically predicted 5 GCSEs or above, they were telling us to do A-levels... So we knew there were other options like GNVQs we knew about other options... So I was asking my teacher, I remember asking her, you know, my teacher, ‘what can I do like humanities at A-levels’ and she was telling me ‘a continuation of this subject would be something like sociology’. So I said ‘what is that?’ and she said ‘it is a continuation of this and you probably look in the Great Britain’. So anyway I was inclined to do that</p>	<p>Early career aspirations</p> <p>Seeking post-16 career advice</p> <p>Teacher advice on post-16 route</p> <p>Aware of post-16 alternatives</p> <p>Seeking teacher advice on post-16 choices</p> <p>Teacher giving advice on post-16 choices</p> <p>Justifying choice as an autonomous decision</p> <p>Accepting role of teacher in post-16 choice</p> <p>Early tentative career aspirations</p>

	and then I started to enjoy English. When I got to Year 10 and 11 I started to enjoy English again it was linked to teacher... At the point I think I didn't really know what I wanted to be, but I wanted to be something like a psychologist or a counsellor, or something like that because I enjoy talking to people...	Justifying tentative choices in terms of personal traits: 'I enjoy talking to people'
00:09:07	MO: and from there on?	
	C[hokri]: Then I went on to pursue A-levels. English literature and language combined, sociology and history... I studied those three subjects for two years, A-levels. I really enjoyed English, out of those three subjects, and the reason I was enjoyed was because we were studying all different text like Shakespearean text, classical text... And I enjoyed that because so I really enjoyed English... Sociology and history, they were ok. They were quite interesting. At that point I wanted, I wasn't really thinking of what I wanted to do. I was thinking of what I wanted to do at degree level, because we were like constantly by the end of AS we were told to basically write personal statement for uni. So all I really knew was that I wanted to study English, because I enjoyed it and I didn't really know what I could become from this, but I was thinking along the line of maybe becoming like an editor or writer or something like that. You know my English teacher encouraged me a lot. We liked each other, and she really wanted me to do English and I really enjoyed and I was doing very well in it. So she was like 'go for it'. So for me it wasn't really about what I wanted to be, it was more to do what I was interested in. So A-levels were finished. I did well and I went to uni. My degree was in language and English language literature and linguistics. I did a three-year-degree in English language and linguistics and this is when I basically started to think about what I really wanted, because at the end of my first year I was offered a job through my friend of basically being an English tutor.	Post-16 choice Developing interest for subject (English) No career plan for post A-levels Contemplating about degree choice School pressure to make choices Uncertain about educational outcome Contemplating about career choice Teacher influence on subject choice Positive rapport with teacher Teacher advice on post-16 choices Good in recommended subject Teacher encouragement 'go for it' Short-term interest vs long-term career Reflective about post-a6 choices Encouraging exam results No changes to post-16 subject choice Career choice taking concrete shape Found job through personal network Job suiting study

	<p>And I needed a part time job any way because I was at uni. So I was like ‘oh yeah’ my passion and I enjoyed it. So I was like ‘oh I don’t mind’... That is when I started to get passion and interest for teaching and this is when I started to think about ‘hey you know what, you can actually be a teacher’ and that was not in my mind set up until that stage anyway... The only thing was I didn’t apply for my PCGE because towards my final year at uni I started to lose interest in teaching because we had a class of 20 and I was like ‘I can’t control the class’. I got so much work and I became disinterested in it. And I started again going into editing, going into something like writing. So I was a bit confused at that stage. Then uni finished. I started applying for a job in an Islamic school, like different environments. I got a job last year. I was working as a teacher assistant and then from then I started to think more about teaching. I didn’t want to be a teacher assistant forever... So last year I applied for my PGCE, and this year I am actually doing my PGCE...</p>	<p>Developing career identity: from ‘I don’t mind’ to ‘my passion’</p> <p>Career choice</p> <p>Recognising what is missing from career portfolio</p> <p>Losing interest - the reality of career demands</p> <p>Studying/working imbalance effect on chosen career</p> <p>Contemplating changing careers</p> <p>Uncertain about next step</p> <p>University education finished</p> <p>Graduate job search</p> <p>Serious about progressing within chosen career</p> <p>Completing professional qualification course</p>
	...	
00:25:46	MO: Is there anybody from the Somali community you look up to and say that person is my role model?	
	<p>C[hokri]: I don’t really know. To be quite honest most of people in my family they are like, I don’t know really. Yeah there are some people, yeah there are. There are like my uncle. They went on to do their degree. A lot of my uncles and aunties came into the country when they were very mature, so they were may be mid-twenties and they went to do their degrees. A lot of them are in really good jobs... Yeah people like that I do look up to them.</p>	<p>Unsure about role model</p> <p>Extended family source of inspiration</p>
	...	
00:26:54	MO: How would you identify yourself?	

	<p>C[hokri]: I guess, you know what, I know this study is on Somali youth in education, but I would firstly identify myself as a Muslim. Obviously I am a Somali person or whatever, but I see my current identity more with the Muslim community rather than just Somalis. For example, there are a lot of Somali people now, especially girls who are going on to uni, getting degrees, who are getting jobs etc. well-paid job and there is even a few Somali teachers... Now the cycle is beginning again with me, because now I am going to be a teacher soon insha Allah. I will be teaching Somali kids and Asian kids, etc., they gonna be looking to me as their teacher. And one thing I have noticed about Somali kids I have worked with in schools is that a lot of difference between the genders. The girls tend to identify with the Asian girls, and the Somalis boys tend to identify themselves more with, you know, the black boys. So there is a difference in the way Somalis raise their boys and their girls and I think that affects them. They come to the education system which kind of explains why girls tend to do, generally anyway, better than boys. I think Somali boys are spoiled.</p>	<p>Muslim identity comes first</p> <p>Obviously Somali, but choose Muslim identity</p> <p>Positive about progress of Somali girls</p> <p>The cycle is beginning with me</p> <p>Conscious of becoming a role model</p> <p>Gender differences in identity</p> <p>Commenting on Somali kids</p> <p>Somali girls identify with the Asians</p> <p>Somali boys identify with the black boys</p> <p>Noticing gender differences in child rearing</p> <p>Feels early upbringing advantageous to girls</p> <p>Spoiled Somali boys</p>
00:29:11	MO: That is interesting. You say Somali girls identify themselves with the Asians and boys	
	...	
	<p>Choukri: Yeah they are more Somali Somalis and they hang around with Somali groups but when they are probably primary school because obviously they are wearing hijab, they would identify themselves with Asian wearing hijab. They would be in that group, whereas Somali boys I think they find it harder to identify with anyone. I think they try sometimes to go with black boys and Asian boys, but I think they are always in the middle because black boys may not be Muslim or whatever, or they might be, but they [Somali boys] don't find it easy to identify with them and then they experience,</p>	<p>Somali girls find common identity with hijab wearing Asians</p> <p>Commenting on Somali girls</p> <p>Somali boys struggle with identity</p> <p>Somali boys torn between non-Muslim black boys and not-welcoming Asian</p>

	from what I have seen anyway, racism from some of the Asian communities. So they tend to just stick to their own.	Somali boys sticking to their own
00:30:24	MO: And in terms of achievement you said that it has implications for their achievement ...	
	Choukri: Yeah, definitely... One of the teachers I was working with said to me ... an inspector came to school and she was talking about a particular boy in our class. This boy was a Somali boy, really unruly and he would have tantrum and stuff like that and she was basically saying 'it is well-known, in the education system it is well-know that Somali boys are very 'over indulged', and that is the same with the Pakistani boys, they are 'over-indulged' and she used that term. And when we asked 'what do you mean?', she said 'because a lot of Somali children are basically brought up in single parent homes.' You know they're brought up by mothers and because she is trying to compensate for the love that he is not getting from his dad and she is giving him everything. So they tend to get their own way and they're very spoiled and she said that is the same with the Pakistani boys and that is why we are having in [area in London] a lot of behavioural problems with Somali boys. So I think it is to do with the way they brought up. They get away with a lot. They are not expected to do much, whereas the girl is kind of told, you know 'come home, make sure you clean this make sure you clean that' and it is the same for a lot of Asian girls as well. So they are taught to be disciplined and obedient whereas the boys are told 'do what you want, just keep yourself occupied'.	<p>Exposed to student stereotyping</p> <p>Stereotyping the Somali boys</p> <p>Seeking clarification about 'stereotyping'</p> <p>Adopting learned discourse and using it to understand Somali boy behaviour</p> <p>Stereotyping the Somali boys</p> <p>Somali boys get away with a lot</p> <p>Gender-based role expectations</p> <p>Gender practice similarities with Asians</p> <p>Girls taught to be disciplined and obedient</p> <p>Boys unrestricted</p>
00:36:52	MO: What about you, Choukri, who do you hang around with in your spare time?	
	Choukri: Most of friends are quite mixed. There [are] a few Somalis, but I think the majority are not even Asian Muslim friends. They're all from different backgrounds.	Mixed friends
00:37:13	MO: Do you have contact with any Somali organisations?	

	Choukri: Would the mosque be one?	
	MO: Hmm	
	Choukri: We go there in the weekends. That is when we see like a lot of Somalis. We basically go there like on Saturdays or Sundays and we read Koran and stuff and that Masjid is mostly all Somalis. The teacher that teaches us is like an older lady. She is obviously my friend. She would be considered as my friend, but at the same time like an auntie of mine. So that is, I guess, the contact we have with Somali community and that of our family, they live around here anyway so we see them a lot as well.	<p>Weekend mosque visits</p> <p>Contact with Somali community limited to mosque visits</p> <p>Studying Koran and meeting Somalis</p> <p>Affiliation with and respect for Koran teacher</p> <p>Extended family</p>
	...	
00:43:10	MO: Where do you call 'home', Choukri?	
	Choukri: I don't think it would be the UK and I don't think it would be Somalia either. I have never been back like my sisters have been back, but at the time I wasn't well, so I didn't go back. We've got basically Universal TV that opened us up to what goes on in Somalia, but at the same time I can't see myself living there. And I don't think 'oh yeah it feels like me coming home'. And it is the same here as well. I don't really feel I belong in this country either. So I would kind of say the only time I felt like 'this is a place I could be at peace' is when I was in my first year of uni we went Hajj, in Mecca. That is the place I would call home even though I was there for only a couple of weeks. It is because I felt really comfortable there. I don't know.	<p>Issues with belonging in the UK</p> <p>Issues with belonging in Somalia</p> <p>No emotional link with native country</p> <p>Satellite television link with country of origin</p> <p>In search of 'It feels like me coming home'</p> <p>Feeling 'out of place' in the UK</p> <p>Faith defining belonging</p> <p>Duration not essential for belonging</p> <p>Identification with sacred site</p>
00:44:26	MO: Similar question I've asked D[eqa], do you know anybody who is working in teaching?	
	C[houkri]: Yeah there [are] loads; there is quite a few Somali teachers. There is a maths Somali teacher I met a while back, there is a science Somali teacher I met a while back. They all tend to be female as	<p>Embedded in professional network</p> <p>Gender and profession</p> <p>No peer influence regarding career</p>

	<p>well... I don't think I went into teaching because there was anyone I really thought 'oh they're doing teaching' apart quite a lot of my friends are actually going into teaching now and one of my closest friends is a teacher now. She is working as a teacher. So I think maybe it did kind of help me come to my decision, because I saw that 'oh they can find a job quite easily'. It is being a teacher you're making a difference as well.</p>	<p>choice</p> <p>Friends making similar career choices</p> <p>Reflective about peer role in career decision making</p> <p>Opportunity-based career choice</p> <p>Job satisfaction</p>
00:45:40	<p>MO: I think we have covered most of the issues, you were quite elaborative ... just one last question for you C[hokri]. If you look back what you've done so far, is there anything you have done differently?</p>	
	<p>C[hokri]: Not really. I would actually like probably a year go if you asked me, last year I was thinking of 'oh yeah I should've done my PCGE last year and then I would've been working as a teacher'. I don't know. But the reason why, I think, that year out was really good for me. It gave me that classroom experience I was exposed to different children. And I worked with children with special needs and that is an area now, now that I've experience in it, I really wanna pursue. And that is another thing, because you know we were watching Somali TV me and my mum the other day. And she was basically telling me, how, there is not really like, this is something I really would love in Somalia is set up a special needs school, because my mum was telling me, we were watching together anyway, and there was children they all got autism, some of them ADHD, some of them blind, physical impairment and they wanted to enter the educational arena ... If I never had experience with those children with special needs, I would now not want to go into it or set up school in Somalia or help set up schools here. Actually, I wouldn't have done things differently. I think it is a learning curve.</p>	<p>Enthusiastic about chosen career</p> <p>Practical experience essential for career choice</p> <p>Developing new ambitions</p> <p>Role of media in developing ambitions</p> <p>Developing awareness of how to use acquired experiences</p> <p>Parental role in engendering career choice</p> <p>Experience feeding into new passion</p> <p>Certain about career decision</p> <p>Career choice as a learning curve</p>

	...	
00:48:37	MO: Where do you see yourself in the coming five years?	
	C[houkri]: I don't really know. I hope to have finished my NQT, my newly qualified teacher status, and hopefully ... maybe working in a special needs school again, but this time as a teacher and getting more experience and then one day set up, insha Allah, a special needs school.	<p>Careful about saying too much about future</p> <p>Ideas about furthering career development</p> <p>Eager to get more experience</p> <p>Remaining hopeful about future</p>
	...	
00:49:09	MO: Fantastic. Thank you very much	

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